

Ceylon WMA Historical Summary

Jason Lee, 3-3-2020

Ceylon is located on Floyd's Neck, in Camden County GA, on the southern banks of the Satilla River. Ceylon is also known locally as Big Pasture due to its expansive open longleaf savannahs and marshes. In the pre-colonial era, Ceylon contained the (Native American) Timucuan village of Yufera village, which faded from history by the mid-1600s. Starting in the 1760's, English land grants were conveyed to settlers, including Charles Floyd in 1800 and who came to own much of the Floyd's Neck area, and after which Floyd's Neck is named. Within the boundaries of Ceylon are the pre-Civil war former sites of the Gatehouse, Hermitage and Pine Barrens Plantations. After the Civil war, and during Reconstruction, railroads were rebuilt and the major industry in Camden County and the Satilla watershed became lumber and naval stores. The great longleaf pine forest of the area was harvested, and the timber floated down the Satilla River for export.

Ceylon Mill Village was built in 1874 by the Hilton and Dodge Timber Company and operated through the early 20th century on a southern bluff of the Satilla River on Ceylon. Ceylon was named for the Southeastern Asia country (current-day Sri Lanka, then British Ceylon) where tea was grown and shipped to the world, as tea was an important economic product for the British Empire. Ceylon's protected deepwater location enabled a thriving port town capable of processing lumber and shipping abroad. In 1915, as the longleaf timber harvest waned in the upstream Satilla watershed, a devastating accident sealed the town's fate. Tradition says the night watchman failed to add adequate water to the mill's boiler, resulting in the boiler exploding and landing on the north side of the Satilla River. Soon after, the owners of Ceylon begin relocating the village's buildings, and the land was eventually converted back to timber holdings. Over the ensuing years, the Sea Island Company purchased the properties from several small owners and came to hold much of the Floyd's Neck acreage. Until recently, Ceylon and the adjacent Cabin Bluff were managed by the Sea Island Company for timber and for wildlife, using prescribed fire and low-impact timber harvest. As a result, the intact habitats on the property, including the pine flatwoods, upland longleaf, and maritime forest, tidal saltmarsh, freshwater and freshwater wetlands are in exceptional natural condition. At least one stand of longleaf pine contains trees older than 145 years! This age, and its intact groundcover make it one of the oldest and perhaps most natural stands of longleaf pine wiregrass savanna on the Georgia Coast. This is even more notable considering the town responsible for processing the longleaf from the rest of the Satilla watershed was so close nearby (Ceylon Mill Village).

Ceylon Cemetery contains gravesites from 2 eras, the Gatehouse Plantation and the Ceylon Mill Village period. William McNish, owner of Gatehouse, is buried there, as are mill families such as the Fosters, Parkers, and McGregory's.

Ceylon Ecological Attributes

- The Ceylon Tract is located on 3 separate Pleistocene ridges (the Princess Anne and 2 different Pamlico shorelines), which were barrier islands 40 and 100 thousand years ago, respectively. These ridges are surrounded by freshwater wetlands and saltmarsh, creating a diverse topography resulting in dry sandy uplands, flat ridge tops, and ample wetlands nearby. Its elevations range from Sea Level to 35 Feet Mean Sea Level.
- The property is one of the most important properties for gopher tortoises in Georgia.
- A network of relatively intact wetland ponds across the property provides breeding habitat for ecologically important amphibian species.
- Several globally imperiled natural communities are also found on the property, including these substantial amounts:
 - 1,400 acres mature Maritime live oak forest
 - 4,000 longleaf Longleaf pine-wiregrass uplands
 - 6,400 acres of Saltmarsh
 - 1,200 acres of Freshwater Wetlands
- Ceylon borders the lower Satilla River for nearly twelve miles. The Satilla has been identified as one of Georgia's highest priority streams by our State Wildlife Action Plan, has breeding populations of federally endangered Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon, and is important summer habitat for the federally threatened Florida manatee. At the mouth of the Satilla, and adjacent to Ceylon's boundary, is State Natural Area Satilla Marsh island, which is one the State's most important seabird rookeries, including American Oystercatchers and our largest Brown Pelican nesting colony.