

Pierce Mounds Restore Act Submittal Form

Project Name: Pierce Mounds Complex/Cottage Hill Site: Environmental and Historical Preservation

Contact Information:

Project Location:

The project consists of approximately 550 acres of historically and environmentally valuable lands located northwest of Apalachicola, Florida.

Project Description:

The Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas (CAMA) proposes an acquisition of land that encompasses the conservation and preservation of the Pierce Mounds Complex and the adjacent Cottage Hill site located in the Apalachicola Bay Estuary watershed. Currently, The Cottage Hill site is platted for 20 units per acre residential construction, with little to no existing infrastructure. Due to its proximity to the coast, these facilities would directly affect the Scipio Creek watershed which drains into the Apalachicola Bay. Additionally, there are highly ranked historical and cultural values associated with this site, including the existing rail bed and boardwalk. Finally, the Pierce Mound site abuts Turtle Harbor, a tidally influenced freshwater basin that has bottom characteristics similar to other Florida water bodies located near pre-Columbian sites. It is known at other similar sites that the benthic habitats contain significant archeological artifacts. CAMA would like to acquire this land for three main reasons, watershed protection for Apalachicola River and Bay, archaeological value protection, and the historical railway connected to the River Ramble boardwalk trail. CAMA has identified Turtle Harbor as a prospective property to become the 42nd Aquatic Preserve in the State of Florida.

This project proposes the acquisition of 71 upland lots in Cottage Hill, a largely undeveloped, platted and recorded subdivision just inside the city limits of Apalachicola that is currently zoned for residential multi-family development to a maximum density of 20 units/acres. Exclusive of rights-of-way, a total of 9.8 acres of upland watershed which is immediately adjacent to high quality Apalachicola River floodplain marsh would be protected from development impacts. Currently there are only three single family homes located within this subdivision, and they would remain privately owned.

The City of Apalachicola owns 62 of the Cottage Hill lots proposed for acquisition as well as the right of way. Some of the streets on the plat have been developed, but not paved. Currently, neither City of Apalachicola water utilities nor drainage system have been extended into this site, and the City is not able to extend sewer services due to sewer plant capacity limitations. However, the pattern of residential development in recent years has been in this area.

The Pierce Mounds site and adjacent property rests on approximately 300 acres of land currently owned by the Mahr Development Corporation. These acres are contained within three large parcels encompassing the Peirce Mounds site and surrounding a portion of Turtle Harbor. This property is essential for the acquisition and management of the Pierce Mounds site and of the potential Turtle Harbor Aquatic Preserve.

Estimated project Costs:

Estimated Costs	Cost
Land Acquisition	\$2,308,313.00
Restoration	\$315,000.00
Monitoring/ Maintenance	\$700,000.00
Site Improvements	\$255,000.00
Overall Total	\$3,578,313.00

Other Funding:

US Forest Service, Community Forestry Grants based on an in part match.

National Fish and Wildlife Funds may be pursued due to effects on shore birds and wildlife in the area.

Technical Feasibility:

The project will be managed by The Foundation for Florida Geotourism Associates, a not for profit Florida corporation, who will receive the funds, perform the acquisition and the donation of the acquired lands to the state, contract for the restoration need, manage the public access and geotourism facility installation, and also manage the monitoring and maintenance projects for a period of six years within coordination with CAMA.

Environmental Benefits:

In 1988 the Department of Health conducted a study of the septic tanks within the Apalachicola area and determined that approximately 39 percent of the systems were rated unsatisfactory. Restoration and preservation of these tracts will help prevent the degradation of local water sources that would come from additional development. The oyster population has declined by 90 percent in the last two years. Conservation of this property will reduce potential degradation of the much needed water resources and therefore maintaining and enhancing the habitat for the region's wildlife, maintaining a much needed source of fresh water inputs into the system. Such inputs are critical for the oysters and the people whose livelihoods depend on them.

Economic and Social Benefits: Oysters, public health, history:

As mentioned above, the protection of this property has the potential to limit water quality degradation within the area, thereby protecting the oyster fields in which Franklin County relies. A large percentage of the county workforce either harvests or works in support of what is now a federally declared disaster in the oyster industry. Water quality must be maintained to ensure a healthy oyster population and the continuation of a long standing harvesting culture.

Another major benefit of this project is the potential to preserve historical artifacts from the Pre-Columbian time period. Once the area has been analyzed and secured for archeological research, parts of the property will be open to the public for education in both history and the environment. The location will have areas for low impact activities such as hiking and picnicking to ensure that the property serves the public while still preserving the archeological features of the site.

Another social benefit is that human interaction with nature has the ability to improve human functioning. In *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective*, the authors summarize similar findings. “The benefits that people experience in nature are closely related to these aesthetic factors. First, aesthetic natural environments give pleasure; they are satisfying to experience. Second, such settings support human functioning. They provide a context in which people can manage information effectively; they permit people to move about and explore with comfort and confidence. And, finally, such environments foster the recovery from mental fatigue. They permit tired individuals to regain effective functioning.” (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989, p. 196) While personal differences exist, the Kaplans’ document that the majority of these experiences are overwhelmingly positive. The initiative seeks to immerse individuals in the natural environment and to provide an educational and restorative experience.

Kaplan R. & Kaplan S. (1989). *The Experience of Nature A Psychological Perspective*. New York, NY: Cam.

Community Resilience:

In order to be prepared in the event of a natural hazard and to reduce the impacts of coastal erosion, the restoration and preservation of shorelines is critical. The proposed acquisitions are located on the northwestern side of Apalachicola and could provide direct benefits in the form of erosion control and storm/ flood mitigation. As mentioned above, oyster harvesting is one of Franklin County’s primary economic drivers and, as such any efforts that will protect the water quality will directly benefit many residents. Franklin County’s unique oyster culture has been in danger in recent years, but with proper preservation along the shorelines, some of the damage can be mitigated.

Additionally, marsh habitat is critical to absorbing energy during coastal storms. Some of the floodplain marsh associated with Cottage Hill is degraded and in need of restoration. Restoration and protection of other more pristine marsh areas serves as a buffer to the mounds, as well as the historic Magnolia cemetery located adjacent to the proposed sites.

Conflicts of Compliments to Existing Efforts:

This request is directly complimenting efforts by the 1994 Land Acquisition and Advisory Council which added the Pierce Mounds Complex to the conservation and recreation lands priority list. The Florida Forever program will benefit greatly by allowing for the allocation of funds to other properties after this has been purchased. This project has been waiting for appropriate funding for approximately 19 years and will now have the opportunity to be properly preserved and restored.

Complies with Federal, State, Local and Tribal Laws/regulations:

Yes, this project will comply with Federal, State, Local and Tribal Laws/Regulations.

Readiness for Implementation:

Upon acceptance of funding the project will move ahead with the proposed acquisitions within the first year of acquisition. In agreement with the Florida Forever work plan, CAMA’s Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve will serve as the onsite managers of the new preserve due to their close proximity within the county. CAMA will be working in cooperation with the Division of Historical

Resources to ensure proper handling and preservation of the historical and archeological resources within the area.

Public Acceptance:

The communities surround the Pierce Mounds Complex have long been in favor of the acquisition of this land by the State. It is a desirable location for conservation and preservation efforts, and the public is highly opposed to the development of this land. Support from local environmental and historical groups has been realized and is expected to grow shortly after acquisition. Franklin County residents have historically been accepting of projects designed to protect the Apalachicola Bay and its declining oyster industry.

Cost Appendix:

Cost Appendix	Cost
Lot acquisition costs (City of Apalachicola)	\$558,000.00
Lot acquisition costs (Franklin County)	\$22,500.00
Lot acquisition costs (Private Owners)	\$242,190.00
Lot acquisition – Pierce Mounds (Mahr Development Corporation)	\$1,285,623.00
Street Rights-of-way acquisition (City of Apalachicola)	\$200,000.00
Projected marsh restoration with reconstruction at 90,000 per acre: (3.5 of 300 acres require restoration)	\$315,000.00
Monitoring and Maintenance of project for 5 years	\$700,000.00
Construction and planning for 3/4 mile of Pedestrian/ Bicycle trail	\$225,000.00
ADA accessible kayak launch	\$30,000.00
Overall Total	\$3,578,313.00

Additional Information:

Approximate land Acquisition Map

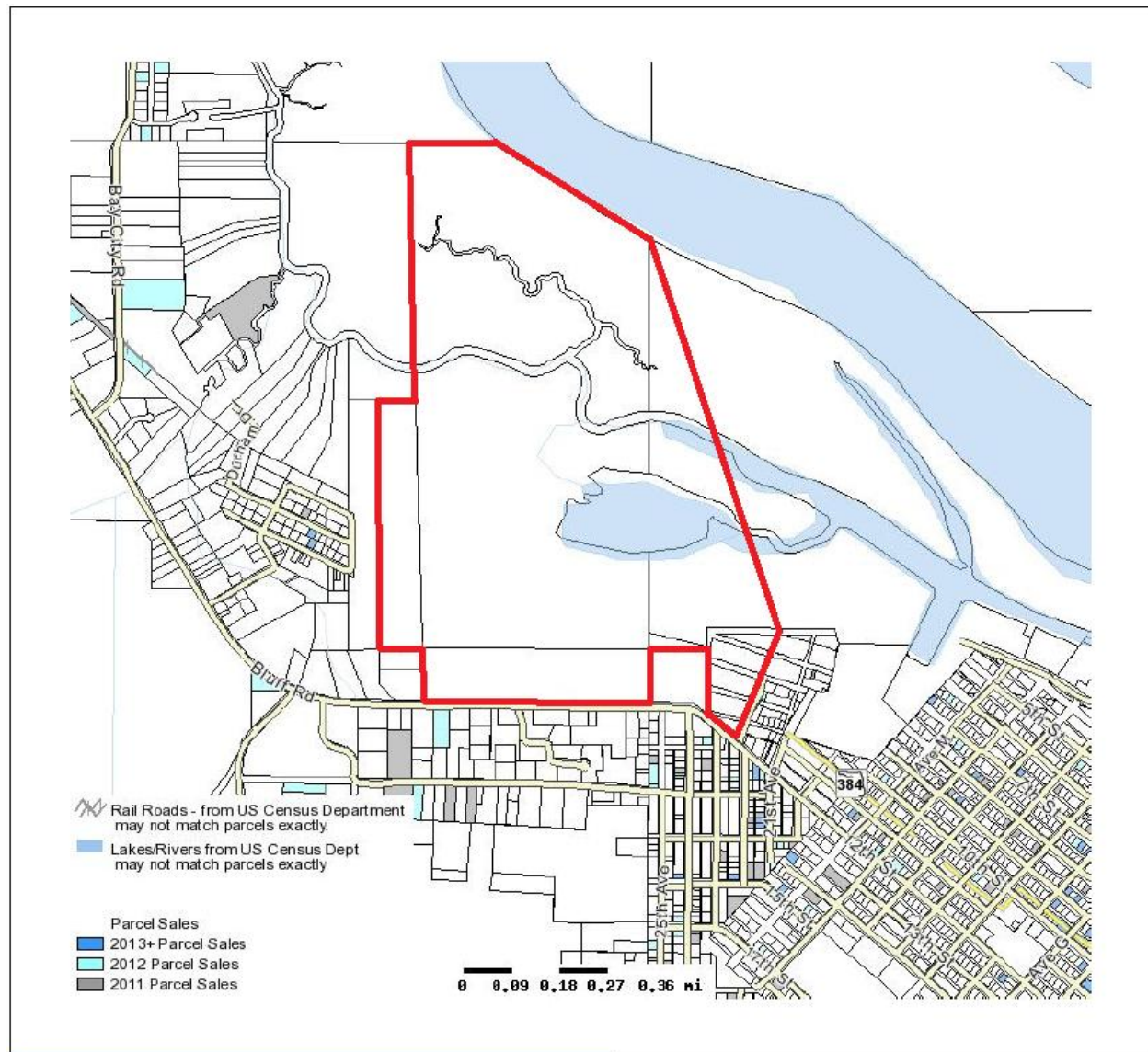


Figure 1: Courtesy of Franklin County Property Appraiser