



# FLORIDA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

*Affiliated With National Wildlife Federation*

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Mr. Toby Baker  
Gulf Restoration Council Representative  
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
PO Box 13087  
Austin, TX 78711

February 28, 2013

## **Re: RESTORE funding for Land and Water Protection Projects**

Dear Mr. Baker:

RESTORE funding is to be used for ecological and economic enhancements. Fortunately, both of these goals may be reached with land and water protection projects that not only afford water quality and quantity protection, but nature-based recreation for Floridians and tourists, open space, commercial and recreational fishing and oystering and buffering for our existing military bases. All of these provide significant economic drivers to our state. Fortunately, Florida has had in place a long-established mechanism for formulating potential land protection projects that benefit water quality and quantity for the Gulf of Mexico and its ecosystems, particularly those impacted by the Deepwater Oil Disaster.

The Legislatively-created Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever programs, which have enjoyed widespread and bi-partisan political support, were and are based on a rigorous assessment process to evaluate which properties, with willing sellers, would most benefit the public and water quality. As freshwater and estuarine systems that intertwine with the Gulf play a crucial role in fish and other sea life development, several projects center on conservation of properties upstream from the coast.

The following proposed acquisitions, either in fee simple or by perpetual conservation easements, are presently on the Florida Forever list prepared by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection unless otherwise noted. All Florida Forever projects have willing sellers and have been thoroughly vetted. They are categorized below by watershed with a brief description.

### **Perdido Watershed**

**Lower Perdido River Buffer (Escambia County).** This 2,356 acre tract represents the last piece of an ongoing effort to secure protection for the southern portion of the Perdido River. The

land also serves as a buffer for flight paths from Pensacola Naval Air Station. Price: \$11.7 million\*

**La Floresta Perdida (Escambia County)** This approximately 40,000 acre property in Northwest Escambia County has many miles of frontage on the Perdido River, and would compliment other completed conservation projects farther south. While not presently on the Florida Forever list, this tract is of immense ecological value, and the owners may be willing to place a conservation easement over this land to benefit not only the Perdido River, but the water supply of Pensacola. Price: \$100 million

**Perdido Pitcher Plant Prairie (Escambia County)** Part of a partially completed Florida Forever Project, the remaining 2,412 acres would protect a rare bog ecosystem, serve as a major water recharge area and buffer Pensacola Naval Air Station. Price: \$12 million

### **Pensacola Watershed**

**Wolfe Creek Forest (Santa Rosa County)** A 10,075 acre project that buffers Whiting Field and would connect Blackwater River State Forest with other protected areas to the benefit of the military and water quality and quantity flowing into Pensacola's East Bay. Price: \$50.3 million

**Upper Shoal River (Walton County)** Totaling 12,027 acres in two tracts, (2,300 acre Gum Creek Tract and 9,700 acre Pine Log Creek Tract), this project protects the water of Shoal Creek which is a main tributary to the Yellow River, which flows east to East Bay. Protection of this land buffers Eglin Air Force Base on the north and protects water integrity. Price: \$60.1 million

**Garcon Ecosystem (Santa Rosa County)** Successful acquisition of the remainder of this project would complete protection for the Garcon Point peninsula between Escambia and East Bays, and help buffer the Yellow River Marsh Aquatic Preserve. Approximately 3,800 acres remain to be purchased. Price: \$19 million

**Shoal River Buffer (Okaloosa)** Immediately north of Duke Field and Eglin Air Force Base, this project's 2,097 acres would buffer both the base and its military mission, as well as Shoal Creek's water quality. Price: \$10.4 million

### **Choctawhatchee-St. Andrew Watershed**

**Seven Runs Creek (Walton County)** This ongoing single-owner project secures the military mission of Eglin Air Force base and is a critical part of the envisioned Northwest Florida Greenway. By protecting Seven Runs Creek, Eglin will be connected to protected lands eastward. Moreover, this project would protect a significant portion of the Choctawhatchee watershed, thereby improving the water quality of Choctawhatchee Bay. All of the approximately 23,869 acres in the project is to be protected by conservation easements. Price: \$59.6 million

**South Walton Ecosystem (Walton County)** This project is comprised of multiple tracts within and contiguous to Point Washington State Forest. Both Choctawhatchee Bay and Hogtown Bayou would be enhanced by this project, which totals 3,243 acres. Price: \$16.2 million

**West Bay Preservation Area (Bay County)** Complimenting the lands already protected by mitigation for the new Panama City Airport, this 4,494 acre project secures the northern side of West Bay, and has a direct impact on the protection of water quality. Moreover, it is possible more land directly on the Bay and north thereof could be part of larger conservation project to protect additional wetland areas. Price: \$22.4 million plus

**Sand Mountain (Washington and Bay Counties)** Acquisition of these lands would complete public holdings in the existing Econfina State Forest, compliment existing private conservation easement areas, protect unique water recharge lands and secure the source of drinking water for Panama City. The project is a total of 14,495 acres. Price: \$72.4 million

**Bear Creek Forest (Bay/Calhoun/Gulf Counties)** At 100,424 acres, this enormous single-owner tract, which would be protected by an easement, would help complete the Northwest Florida Greenway and enable Eglin Air Force Base to continue flights operations. The riparian eco-systems of Bear Creek and numerable tributaries would also protect water quality and freshwater flows in our rivers. Price: \$251 million

**Knight Family Trust (Washington and Bay Counties)** While not on the present Florida Forever list, this single-ownership tract, interspersed with unique sand hill lakes and water recharge areas, provides fresh water to the aquifer and on to the Gulf. Upwards of 55,000 acres may be preserved by conservation easements. Price: \$137.5 million

### **Apalachicola-Chipola Watershed**

**Apalachicola River (Jackson/Gadsden/Liberty/Calhoun Counties)** The famed Apalachicola River and Bay requires action to keep the oyster industry alive. Acquisition of these parcels, totaling 11,214 acres, would protect and enhance water quality going to the bay and buffer one of the world's last great mainly undeveloped rivers. Price: \$56 million

**St. Vincent Sound to Lake Wimico Ecosystem (Gulf and Franklin Counties)** Totaling approximately 40,000 acres south of Lake Wimico, with a single owner, the Wimico project may be aided by NRDA funding as well as RESTORE. A vast wetland tract, protection by a conservation easement would afford water quality and quantity benefits to the Lake, as well as to Apalachicola and St. Joseph Bays and St. Vincent Sound. Price: \$100 million

### **Ochlockonee-St. Marks Watershed**

**Dickerson Bay/Bald Point (Wakulla and Franklin Counties)** With a single owner, this 2,972 acre project, and upwards of 20,000 acres westward, if acquired, would secure the sensitive lands

westward from the existing Bald Point State Park and St. James Island, protecting water quality in both Ochlockonee Bay and Alligator Harbor. Price: \$14.8 million plus

**Upper St. Marks River Corridor (Leon/Jefferson/Wakulla Counties)** This 11,025 acre project protects the St. Marks River and its contiguous wetlands, thereby enhancing Apalachee Bay. Price: \$55.1 million

**Ayavalla Plantation (Leon County)** With several miles of river frontage on the Ochlockonee river north of Tallahassee, this single owner 6,081 acre project would protect the river, a designated Outstanding Florida Waterway, by a perpetual conservation easement, and aid Ochlockonee Bay. Price: \$15.2 million

**Ochlockonee River Conservation Area (Leon County)** Directly north of the Ayavalla Plantation, this project would complete the protection of east side of the Ochlockonee River to the Florida/Georgia state line, benefitting the river and the Gulf. The 3,269 acre tract is proposed for an easement. Price: \$8.1 million

**Wakulla Springs Protection Zone (Leon and Wakulla Counties)** The water quality of world-renowned Wakulla Springs has long been a vexing issue, and completion of this 3,966 project would protect the unique karst and subterranean water features of surrounding lands and ensure this special place is enhanced, not degraded. The springs create the Wakulla River, eventually flowing into the St. Mark's River and on to Apalachee Bay. Price: \$19.8 million

The following tracts are within the authorized boundary adjustment of the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. All of the projects protect and improve wetland function that directly benefit Apalachee Bay and the St. Marks River and buffer the ecological jewel that is the Refuge. All of the below projects have willing sellers.

**The Nature Conservancy Tract (Jefferson and Wakulla Counties)** At 7,699 acres, acquisition of this parcel would help secure the Refuge boundary south of US 98 and protect streams and wetland systems that feed Apalachee Bay. Price: \$38.4 million

**Sam Shine Tract (Wakulla County)** Purchase of this 8,117 acre tract would, along with the above Nature Conservancy Tract, secure the Refuge boundary and provide water quality and quantity benefits southwards to Apalachee Bay. Price: \$40.5 million

**Lower Ochlockonee River (Franklin County)** Situated on Ochlockonee Bay and wetlands south of the Ochlockonee River, this 2,228 acre parcel provides essential wetlands functions for the bay and the river. Price: \$11.1 million

**Five Smooth Stones Tract (Wakulla County)** Adjacent to the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge and with land along the St. Marks River, an easement on this 930 acre tract would protect water quality and quantity functions. Price: \$2.3 million

**JLT Tract (Wakulla County)** Due south of the Five Smooth Stone tracts, this 1,230 acre conservation easement project would complete protection of the east side of the historic and highly productive St. Marks River south of the town of St. Marks. Price: \$3 million

### **Suwannee River Watershed**

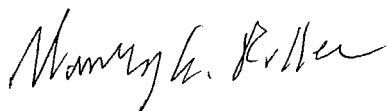
**Caber Coastal Connector (Levy County)** This 7,804 acre project connects the Lower Suwannee River National Wildlife Refuge and the Cedar Key Scrub conservation lands. It lies directly on the Gulf of Mexico and affords high quality fish hatchery areas in the Gulf, while also enhancing Waccasassa Bay. Price: \$39 million

**Lower Suwannee River and Gulf Watershed (Dixie County)** At 46,461 acres, this conservation easement project, when combined with existing easement and public lands in the southern part of Dixie County, would secure water quantity and quality in this vast system of wetlands, aiding both Gulf coastal waters and the Suwannee River. Price: \$116 million

While comprehensive in its description of projects from the Suwannee Basin north and west to the Perdido Watershed, the above list is not intended to be definitive in scope. As this process moves forward, the Florida Wildlife Federation and our allies in the environmental community will be bringing forward additional proposals for Council consideration, particularly Everglades-related projects (e.g., the C-43 Canal and Tamiami Trail) as noted in correspondence from the Everglades Coalition. Additionally, the reestablishment of oyster reefs will not only improve estuarine water quality but aid in economic recovery.

We thank you for your consideration of these and similar proposals that will conserve lands important to the ecology of the Gulf, provide adequate levels of clean freshwater inflows, rebuild wetlands, and restore estuaries to full environmental productivity. Such projects will serve to protect people and property from storm events, and support fishing, tourism and other jobs that depend on a healthy Gulf of Mexico.

Sincerely,



Manley K. Fuller, President

\*Prices are estimates only, and use \$5,000 per acre if purchase is in full fee and \$2,500 per acre if purchases are perpetual conservation easements. Many tracts will sell for less than the estimated per acre prices, especially the larger tracts.