

Lower Suwannee River and Gulf Watershed

Dixie County

Less-Than-Fee

Purpose for State Acquisition

The purpose for the proposed acquisition is to enhance management practices of the ongoing timbering operation, to protect and enhance water quality, and wetland communities, wildlife habitat and archaeological sites found within the proposal boundary. Purchase of a conservation easement over the property would buffer and protect the natural resources of the Suwannee River and the Gulf of Mexico and provide habitat and corridors for rare plants and animals over a wide swath of undeveloped public lands, including the neighboring Big Bend Wildlife Management Area, the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge, water management district conservation areas, and the Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve (BBSAP).

The Lower Suwannee River and Gulf Watershed project meets the Florida Forever measures and public purposes of enhancing the coordination and completion of land acquisition projects, using alternatives to fee-simple; increasing the protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community and landscape levels; protecting, restoring and maintaining the quality and natural functions of land, water and wetland systems of the state; ensuring that sufficient quantities of water are available to meet the current and future needs of natural systems and the citizens of the state; increasing natural resource-based public recreation or educational opportunities; preserving significant archaeological or historic sites; and increasing the amount of forestland available for sustainable management of natural resources.

Manager

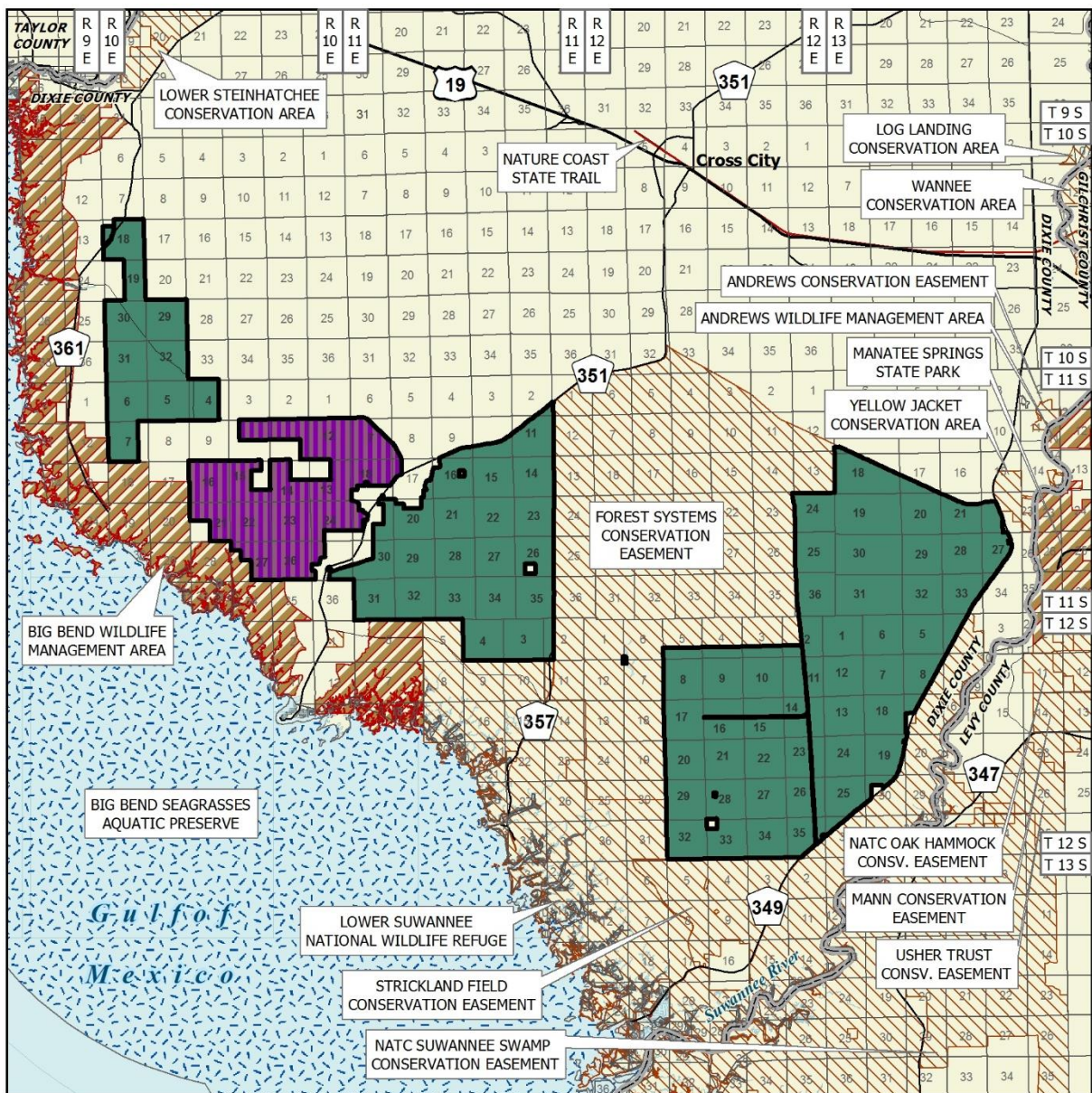
The Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) has volunteered to manage this conservation easement and 10 acres in fee-simple that provide access to California Lake. The SRWMD already holds a conservation easement on the adjacent 32,000 acres. This Forest Systems Conservation Easement or "California Lake" easement was purchased in 2001.

General Description

This project consists of four large undeveloped, forested less-than-fee tracts in Dixie County. It is a total of 46,519 (GIS) acres. The parcels range in size from 5,800 to 19,200 acres, and include a 10-acre tract proposed for fee-simple acquisition. The 10-acre parcel will guarantee continued public access to California Lake, a traditional use located within the SRWMD's adjacent conservation easement area. The California Lake water body appears to be a wide segment of California Creek rather than a true lake. The proposal area is located between County Road (CR) 358 to the north and CR 349 to the south, about 6 to 10 miles south-southwest of U.S. 19/98, and 1 to 7 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico shoreline. The BBSAP encompasses the submerged lands in this region. Hunting leases are in place over much of the property. Timber harvesting will be prohibited in the hardwood and cypress swamps under the proposed easement, as it is in the adjacent California Lake easement. Considering the importance of the hardwood and cypress swamps to many wildlife species, this would provide substantial wildlife conservation benefits. This is also secondary habitat for the Florida black bear.

Lower Suwannee River and Gulf Watershed FNAI Elements	
Florida Black Bear	G5T2/S2
Gopher Tortoise	G3/S3
Florida Olive Hairstreak	G5T2/S2
Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake	G4/S3
Pine Snake	G4/S3
Bald Eagle	G5/S3
White Ibis	G5/S4
7 rare species are associated with the project	

Placed on List	2010
Project Area (GIS Acres)	58,542
Acres Acquired (GIS)	8,075
at a Cost of	\$4,178,700
Acres Remaining (GIS)	50,384
Estimated (Tax Assessed) Value of	\$94,249,478



LOWER SUWANNEE RIVER AND GULF WATERSHED

DIXIE COUNTY

-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Acquired for Conservation (Less-Than-Fee)
-  Essential Parcel(s) Remaining
-  State Owned Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  State Aquatic Preserves



DECEMBER 2016

The vast natural wetlands on the proposal lands serve to funnel and filter water from the upland areas toward the Suwannee River and/or Gulf of Mexico as well as buffer several small stream systems that meander through the proposal. The topography of the three westernmost properties ranges from 20 to 5 feet above mean sea level (MSL), gradually sloping downward toward the Gulf, forming numerous braided, intermittent stream systems that empty into the marshlands and tidal creeks of the Gulf. The topography of the easternmost tract ranges from 25 to 5 feet above MSL. About half of this tract drains westward into the California Creek basin, a flat, highly braided stream system that is mostly outside the boundary of this tract, and that empties into the Gulf. Waters on the other half of this tract drain southward, bounded by higher ground along CR 349, and then eastward to the Suwannee River. A portion of the easternmost track is within the Fanning/Manatee Springshed.

For the last century, approximately half of the proposal area has been managed for silviculture. Before, the site would have supported a mosaic of mesic and wet flatwoods, hydric hammocks, and swamp, interspersed with many small depression marshes and ponds. Although deep bedding has significantly altered the groundcover, many stands and even recently planted areas seen on site retain good remnant flatwoods vegetation. The proposal property is managed under guidelines of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative to protect water quality, biodiversity, and species at risk.

Hydric hammocks make up the bulk of the natural community acreage on the proposal property. There are several large hammocks in excellent condition with canopies of large hardwood trees. Species composition is typical of good quality hammocks with limestone near the soil surface. Basin and floodplain swamps within the larger hammocks are in excellent condition. Canopy trees are large and dominated by pond cypress, with a mix of hardwoods. Smaller dome swamps are common throughout the pine plantations.

Public Use

The parcels adjacent to the SRWMD's California Lake conservation easement will not be open to the public. The managers have leased the property for hunting for hunt clubs, but no general public access is contemplated.

For the 10-acre fee-simple parcel that is within the boundary of the SRWMD easement, the project would guarantee opportunities for public recreational activities and public access to California Lake.

Acquisition Planning

On December 10, 2010 the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) added the Lower Suwannee River and Gulf Watershed to the Florida Forever list in the Less-Than-Fee category, ranking it as number 6 of 25 projects considered in that category. This less than fee project was sponsored by The Conservation Fund and the SRWMD in a proposal submitted on June 30, 2010. It is approximately 46,441 acres with a 2010 market value of \$94,249,477, all under the same ownership. It also includes fee simple acquisition of 10 acres on the SRWMD's California Lake conservation easement.

On December 9, 2011, this project was placed in the Less-than-Fee category of Florida Forever projects.

On September 13, 2016 a conservation easement over 8,075 acres of the Lyme Timber Company was acquired in this project at a cost of \$4,178,700 and will be managed by the Suwannee River Water Management District.

On October 16, 2015 the ARC voted to add the 12,023-acre Otter Sinks proposal in Dixie County to the Florida Forever program, and to make it an addition to the Lower Suwannee River and Gulf Watershed project. This is a rectangular area west of County Road 349, adjacent to the existing project.

Coordination

The SRWMD is a partner in this project.

Management Policy Statement

As a proposed conservation easement or other less – than-fee interest, the project will be managed by the private landowner with restrictions under the agreement. The purchase of development rights, the prohibition of any further conversion of existing natural areas to agricultural uses, and limited public access to some sites will likely be the primary focus of the conservation easement, similar to that established for the adjacent SRWMD easement with the same landowner. The 10-acre fee simple interest parcel in this project will be managed by the SRWMD. The primary management objective will be focused on recreational opportunities associated with the boat ramp. The property will be managed at the District's base level of recreational development which will include a designated, stabilized parking area for vehicles and trailers using the existing boat ramp. The parking area will be enclosed by a rail fence. A kiosk with information about the site and its recreational use is also planned. Maintenance of the boat ramp and general oversight of the property will also take place.

Management Prospectus

Qualifications for State Designation The less-than-fee portion of the Lower Suwannee River and Gulf Watershed project meets Florida Forever measures of using alternatives to fee-simple acquisitions, protecting Strategic Habitats, natural floodplains and significant surface waters. The proposed 10-acre fee-simple-title site meets Florida Forever measures of protecting Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas, natural floodplains and significant surface waters.

Manager The landowner would manage the site. The SRWMD, or a successor, would oversee the conservation easement. The SRWMD will manage the 10-acre fee-simple-title site.

Conditions affecting intensity of management Half of this property has been managed for silviculture for the last century. Sustainable timber management practices have evolved over the years and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative bolsters conservation practices such as providing for buffers around wetlands. The overall historic management of the property has been for wood and wood products using sustainable timber management practices. The 10-acre site includes a mixture of natural pine and bottomland hardwood tree species as well as an access road and boat ramp. SRWMD does not expect to harvest timber on the site for commercial purposes, but may need to remove underbrush or selected individual trees in order to maintain a healthy ecosystem.

Timetable for implementing management and provisions for security and protection of infrastructure

Not applicable to the conservation easement but management implementation will begin immediately after fee simple title is taken on the 10-acre site in order to keep the boat ramp available for public use. Other improvements on the 10-acre site will begin within one year. Security will be provided through the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission as well as other existing contractors for maintenance of infrastructure.

Estimates of Revenue-generating potential

None under a conservation easement and no revenue is expected from the 10-acre fee simple site.

Capital project expenditures Not applicable under a conservation easement but expenditures for a parking area and fencing for the fee simple 10-acre site are estimated to be approximately \$1,000.

Recommendations for other governmental agency involvement

Since the SRWMD holds the easement for the California Lake parcel, it may be more appropriate for them to pursue acquisition and fee simple title to the 10-acre parcel providing access to California Lake.

Revenue sources, management costs and employees needed The cost of the monitoring by SRWMD staff could add to the administrative costs of the easement. No sources of revenue are known at this time, nor are there any startup costs involved.

Updated July 14, 2017