

ITEM 11:

Consider project evaluation reports for the Buzzard Roost, Chamonix, Levys Prairie, New River Watershed, Oak Creek Flatwoods, Ocklawaha Bufferlands, Putnam Clay Timberlands, and Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension 2026 Cycle 2 Florida Forever proposals.

DIVISION OF STATE LANDS STAFF REMARKS:

On April 15, 2026, the Division of State Lands received the Buzzard Roost, Chamonix, Levys Prairie, New River Watershed, Oak Creek Flatwoods, Ocklawaha Bufferlands, Putnam Clay Timberlands, and Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension Florida Forever 2026 Cycle 2 project proposals. On June 12, 2026, ARC voted to move all eight proposals on for more detailed review.

The Florida Forever assessment team visited each site in June and July 2026. Division staff then prepared project evaluation reports based on information provided by ARC member agencies, the Florida Natural Areas Inventory, and other agency contributors. Those reports are included as backup to this item. The Division held regional public hearings on August 26, 2026, in Palatka; September 2, 2026, in Arcadia; and October 9, 2026, in Tallahassee.

Proposal	Acres	Acquisition Type	County	Prospective Manager
Buzzard Roost	7,059	Less-Than-Fee	DeSoto and Hardee	DSL
Chamonix	961	Less-Than-Fee	Leon	DSL
Levys Prairie	2,272	Less-Than-Fee	Putnam	DSL
New River Watershed	1,370	Less-Than-Fee	Union	DSL
Oak Creek Flatwoods	3,196	Less-Than-Fee	Hardee	DSL
Ocklawaha Bufferlands	3,294	Less-Than-Fee	Marion	DSL
Putnam Clay Timberlands	6,977	Fee Simple and Less-Than-Fee	Clay and Putnam	SJRWMD, FWC, and DSL
Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension	5,051	Fee Simple	Columbia	FFS

DIVISION OF STATE LANDS STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the project evaluation reports.

ACQUISITION AND RESTORATION COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:

- () APPROVE
 () APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS: _____
 () DEFER
 () WITHDRAW
 () NOT APPROVE
 () OTHER: _____

Florida Forever Project Evaluation Report

Buzzard Roost DeSoto & Hardee Counties



Acquisition Type: Less-Than-Fee

Acres: 7,059

Just Value: \$46,622,699

Application Date: April 15, 2026

Project Sponsors: Florida Conservation Group

Prepared By:

Division of State Lands

Office of Environmental Services



Submitted to the Acquisition and Restoration Council
October 9, 2026

Executive Summary

The Buzzard Roost Florida Forever proposal contains 13 parcels owned by HRS Buzzard Roost LLC, totaling approximately 7,059 acres in DeSoto and Hardee Counties. The property is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition with a tax assessed value of \$46,622,699.

The proposal is currently used for cattle ranching and hunting. The landowners regularly use prescribed fire to help manage for northern bobwhite quail (*Colinus virginianus*) and other game species, with guidance from Tall Timbers. A cat-faced tree on site provides evidence of former turpentine harvesting.

Much of the Buzzard Roost proposal (over 85%) remains in natural condition. The most notable natural community is mesic flatwoods in excellent condition, consisting of dispersed longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) and southern wiregrass (*Aristida beyrichiana*) maintained by frequent prescribed fire. Areas of scrubby flatwoods can be found interspersed within the mesic flatwoods. Both mesic flatwoods and scrubby flatwoods are under-represented natural communities.

Nearly the entire property (99%) lies within Priority 3 of the Florida Wildlife Corridor, which is designed to protect corridors for rare, imperiled, and long-ranging species. As such, a number of protected species have been reported or documented on site; including the Florida scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*), crested caracara (*Caracara plancus*), roseate spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*), Florida butterfly orchid (*Encyclia tampensis*), and wood stork (*Mycteria americana*). Conservation of Buzzard Roost would help to protect high-quality habitat for a variety of species.

The property lies adjacent to the existing Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever project and is approximately 0.25 miles from the Horse Creek Conservation Easement, which is contiguous with the Peace River Refuge and Limestone Ranch Florida Forever projects. There are also several Florida Forever projects and conservation lands within ten miles of the proposal. The Buzzard Roost proposal would contribute to a network of conservation lands in southwestern Florida.

Buzzard Roost includes two streams that form the headwaters of the Peace River: Buzzard Roost Branch and Brandy Branch. Additionally, the property lies in the Southwest Florida Water Management District's Heartland and Southern Planning Regions for water supply and is within the Southern Water Use Caution Area. Approximately 2,118 acres of the property have been identified as functional wetlands, providing protection for the Buzzard Roost Branch and Brandy Branch floodplains.

If approved for addition to the 2027 Florida Forever Priority List, the proposal should be considered as an addition to the Myakka Ranchlands project in the Less-Than-Fee category. All ±7,059 acres proposed for acquisition are considered essential due to the resources documented on the property (see Appendix C). An interagency team conducted a site visit on July 14, 2026. Information included in this report is a result of the site visit.

PURPOSE FOR ACQUISITION

If acquired, the Buzzard Roost proposal would contribute to the water quality and quantity of the Peace River, its tributaries, and headwaters; conserve exemplary natural communities and protect critical wildlife habitat. Acquisition would support the responsible stewardship of working lands and expand an existing network of conservation lands in southwest Florida, spanning from the Peace River to the Myakka River State Park.

Acquisition of this property would meet the following Florida Forever Goals, Criteria and Priorities:

Goal	Criteria		Priority	
A ☒	(a) ☒	(h) ☐	(a) ☐	(h) ☒
B ☒	(b) ☒	(i) ☐	(b) ☐	
C ☒	(c) ☐	(j) ☐	(c) ☒	
D ☒	(d) ☐	(k) ☒	(d) ☒	
E ☐	(e) ☐	(l) ☐	(e) ☐	
F ☐	(f) ☒		(f) ☐	
G ☒	(g) ☒		(g) ☐	
H ☐				
I ☐				

*Projects proposed to be funded pursuant to Section 259.105(3)(b), F.S., must meet at least one of the criteria outlined under Section 259.105(9), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0021, F.A.C., and shall meet at least two of the Florida Forever goals and measures outlined in Section 259.105(4), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0022, F.A.C.

LOCATION AND PROXIMITY TO OTHER MANAGED AREAS

The Buzzard Roost proposal includes a single contiguous block of ca. 7,058.9 acres spanning the boundary between DeSoto and Hardee counties. The property is proposed for less-than-fee protection through a conservation easement.

The property is an irregularly shaped block of land about 4.5 miles north to south and 4.5 miles east to west situated ca. 10 miles northwest of Arcadia along the western boundaries of DeSoto and Hardee Counties. The land lies roughly midway between the Myakka and Peace Rivers, with most of the proposal falling within the Horse Creek subbasin of the Peace River watershed. About 1.8 miles of the site's northern boundary adjoins the Quail Creek Farms Conservation Easement, and the eastern edge of the proposal is only 0.25 miles from the Horse Creek Conservation Easement, which connects to the Horse Creek Ranch Conservation Easement and the Montalvo Conservation Easement. The Flint DeSoto Conservation Easement and Keen Family Ranch Rural Lands Protection Easement are within 5 miles. There

are 27 conservation lands, mainly to the south and west, within 10 miles. Various unacquired tracts in the Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever project are nearby, with the closest adjoining the northwest corner of the proposal. Properties included in the Limestone Ranch and Peace River Refuge Florida Forever projects are also within 5 miles of the site.

RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

Florida Natural Areas Inventory

This evaluation is based on field observations, as well as information gathered from the proposal, aerial photography, U.S. Geological Survey 7.5' topographic maps, Cooperative Land Cover data (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission [FWC] and Florida Natural Areas Inventory [FNAI], Florida Cooperative Land Cover Map, version 4.0), the FNAI Natural Heritage database, and other publicly available GIS data sources. A site visit was conducted on July 14, 2026 by the Acquisition and Restoration Council liaison staff, including FNAI scientists Amy Jenkins and Gwen Iacona.

The Buzzard Roost proposal straddles Buzzard Roost Branch, which flows eastward through the property as a channelized creek, meeting with Horse Creek about 6.6 miles downstream from where it leaves the property. Brandy Branch, another tributary of Horse Creek, originates from headwaters in the northeastern corner of this proposal. The topography of the site is gently rolling, with wetlands surrounding the creeks lying at ca. 70 feet above sea level, and the intervening hills rising to 80-85 feet.

The majority of this site — over 85% of the proposal acreage — consists of relatively unaltered natural areas. Mesic flatwoods are the predominant landcover (ca. 49% of the site), occupying most of the uplands. Widely scattered longleaf pine are the dominant tree species, and the open forest structure displays characteristics of an old growth multi-aged stand including flat topped individuals and patches of new recruitment in both grass and rocket stages of development. There is evidence of prior turpentine use of the site including a cat-faced tree with an axe carved sap collection container in the base of the tree. The areas of mesic flatwoods observed in the site visit are in excellent condition with an herbaceous groundcover dominated by southern wiregrass maintained by the site's history of frequent prescribed fire. The groundcover is diverse and includes a wide variety of native grasses, forbs and short shrubs including bottlebrush threeawn (*Aristida spiciformis* var. *spiciformis*), coastalplain honeycomb-head (*Balduina angustifolia*), Florida alicia (*Chapmannia floridana*), seaside sandmat (*Euphorbia polygonifolia*), gopher apple (*Geobalanus oblongifolius*), gallberry (*Ilex glabra*), dwarf live oak (*Quercus minima*), lopsided indiagrass (*Sorghastrum secundum*) and hog plum (*Ximenia americana*). Interspersed patches of taller shrubs included fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*) and saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*). Slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*) and sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*) are occasionally present.

Areas of scrubby flatwoods are interspersed with the mesic flatwoods and frequent on the higher elevations of the site. Longleaf pine is scattered throughout, although in some stands sand pine (*Pinus clausa*) is also present. Large sand live oaks and an abundance of midstory oaks including Chapman's oak (*Quercus chapmanii*), bluejack oak (*Quercus incana*), dwarf live oak and myrtle oak (*Quercus myrtifolia*) suggest that fire has been excluded from these areas for decades. However, interspersed patches of open sand harbor herbaceous species including southern wiregrass, chaffhead (*Carphephorus* sp.), bluestem (*Andropogon* sp.), Florida alicia, Elliott's milkpea (*Galactia elliottii*), sweet goldenrod (*Solidago odora*), lopsided indiagrass and hoary-pea (*Tephrosia* sp.). Other frequent shrubs and vines include gopher

apple, coastalplain staggerbush (*Lyonia fruticosa*), saw palmetto and earleaf greenbrier (*Smilax auriculata*). In a few places the overstory includes scattered turkey oak (*Quercus laevis*) suggesting characteristics of sandhill.

In two areas of the site, the scrubby flatwoods grade into xeric hammock, although often with scrubby flatwoods inclusions. Here a canopy of mature sand live oak overhang Chapman's oak, myrtle oak and saw palmetto to create a shady forest floor with minimal herbaceous understory but occasional clumps of sandhill beaksedge (*Rhynchospora megalocarpa*).

Patches of wet flatwoods surround a large area of forested wetland in the northeast corner of the site and some of the drains around it. In these areas slash pine and live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) are the dominant tree species and young slash pines are densely recruiting in the wetter areas where there is less frequent fire. A dense herbaceous understory includes blue maidencane (*Amphicarpum muehlenbergianum*), purple bluestem (*Andropogon cretaceus*), big carpetgrass (*Axonopus furcatus*), toothache grass (*Ctenium aromaticum*), witchgrass (*Dichanthelium* sp.), fascicled beaksedge (*Rhynchospora fascicularis*), Carolina redroot (*Lachnanthes caroliniana*) and yellow milkwort (*Polygala rugelii*). Clumps of small to medium stature shrubs are frequent and include fourpetal St. John's wort (*Hypericum tetrapetalum*), gallberry, southern bayberry (*Morella cerifera*) and saw palmetto.

Isolated wetlands (mainly depression marshes and basin marshes, some with a wet prairie fringe) are embedded within the flatwoods landscape. The depression marshes are dominated by herbaceous species including maidencane (*Hymenachne hemitoma*), rosy camphorweed (*Pluchea baccharis*), Colombian waxweed (*Cuphea carthagenensis*), bluestem, spadeleaf (*Centella erecta*), slimpod rush (*Juncus diffusissimus*), soft rush (*Juncus effusus* ssp. *solutus*) and smartweed (*Persicaria* sp.). Shrubs and small trees are present widely scattered throughout and/or as a ring around the edge. These include red maple (*Acer rubrum*), common buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*), southern bayberry, swamp tupelo (*Nyssa biflora*) and occasional invasive Peruvian primrosewillow (*Ludwigia peruviana*; Florida Invasive Species Council [FISC] Category 1).

Patches of wet prairie are characterized by grasses, including blue maidencane, maidencane, purple bluestem and big carpetgrass, interspersed with a myriad of other herbaceous species, many of which were flowering during the site visit. Other observed species include spadeleaf, flatsedge (*Cyperus* sp.), tenangle pipewort (*Eriocaulon decangulare*), dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*), Carolina redroot, whitehead bogbutton (*Lachnocaulon anceps*), turkey tangle fogfruit (*Phyla nodiflora*), yellow milkwort, pale meadowbeauty (*Rhexia mariana*), fascicled beaksedge, rosegentian (*Sabatia* sp.) and Carolina yellow-eyed grass (*Xyris caroliniana*). In some areas the site managers have been mowing to reduce shrub cover, but southern bayberry was frequently observed. In some areas slash pine trees are establishing in the wet prairie.

In the southern half of the site, Buzzard Roost Branch is surrounded by a broad area of basin marsh which, due to artificial drainage, includes areas that resemble wet prairie. The site visit only included the furthest northwestern corner of this broad expanse of wetter areas that included the creek and surrounding bands of forest (mesic hammock, baygall, and other forested wetlands) that grade into the adjacent flatwoods. The observed marsh is heavily grazed and dominated by maidencane and rushes including slimpod rush and soft rush but also includes species such as bluestem, spadeleaf, common buttonbush, sugarcane

plumegrass (*Erianthus giganteus*) and Colombian waxweed. Some areas included patches of shrubs and small trees including red maple, dahoon (*Ilex cassine*), primrosewillow (*Ludwigia* sp.), southern bayberry and swamp tupelo. Invasive grasses present in small amounts include West Indian marsh grass (*Hymenachne amplexicaulis*) and torpedo grass (*Panicum repens*), both Florida Invasive Species Council Category 1 species.

A small inclusion of dome swamp on the edge of the marsh has an overstory of pond cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*) and an open understory that includes fireweed (*Erechtites hieraciifolius*) and soft rush. According to the manager this is the only cypress on the site.

Bands of mesic hammock form the ecotone between upland and wetland in several regions across the site. In these areas, live oak and saw palmetto are the most widespread components with slash pine and sand live oak scattered throughout. Epiphytes are frequent including ballmoss (*Tillandsia recurvata*), Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*), and Florida butterfly orchid (*Encyclia tampensis*, state listed as commercially exploited). The understory is sparse but includes soft rush with occasional southern bayberry shrubs scattered throughout.

Only a small portion of the site is covered by anthropogenic landcover types. Areas of improved pasture near the center of the site make up about 9% of the proposal. These areas have been planted in Bahia grass (*Paspalum notatum*) but also include native species such as purple bluestem and slender flattop goldenrod (*Euthamia caroliniana*). Other altered landcover types on the site are minimal, and include a few artificial ponds, wildlife openings, a utility corridor, a homesite, and a network of unpaved access roads.

Table 1. Natural communities and landcover types within Florida Forever proposal

Community or Landcover	Acres	Percent of Proposal
mesic flatwoods	3,464	49
depression marsh	661	9
scrubby flatwoods	413	6
basin marsh	397	6
freshwater forested wetlands	392	6
wet prairie	329	5
mesic hammock	186	3
baygall	108	2
xeric hammock	104	1
wet flatwoods	103	1
dome swamp	23	<1
basin swamp	2	<1
pasture-improved	656	9
successional hydric shrubland/forest	72	1
pasture-semi-improved	50	1
clearing/regeneration	24	<1
utility corridor	21	<1
canal/ditch	16	<1
developed	11	<1
successional hardwood forest	9	<1
road	8	<1
pasture - semi-improved	4	<1
artificial pond	4	<1
agriculture	2	<1
spoil area	1	<1
Total	7,059	100

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

This summary provides an assessment of fish and wildlife resources on the Buzzard Roost less than fee Florida Forever proposal based on field observations during the July 14, 2026, site visit, and on associated GIS analysis and review of species population and status resources.

There is a high diversity of habitat types on the property, ranging across much of the hydric spectrum. Marsh with bay and buttonwood, and wet prairie with abundant natural grasses sit alongside large areas of mesic flatwoods. These wetter areas transition relatively quickly to scrub-shrub and pasture edge ecotones, then to the dry uplands that account for approximately 20% of the property. It appeared that the driest scrubby areas may not have burned recently, with some successional non-scrub oak species present. Occasional lines of slash pines were planted 50 years ago and are now mature. A high voltage line and corridor is currently undergoing construction; it nearly bisects the property from near the northwest corner towards the southeast.

The property has been maintained for northern bobwhite quail (*State Species of Greatest Conservation Need [SGCN]*) hunting for over 50 years. Over 15,000 pounds of milo are spread across the more than 100 miles of rudimentary roads every month, resulting in a high density of quail that the land managers survey annually. The property is divided into 25 burn units, and the managers aim to achieve a two-year burn interval outside of the quail nesting season. This dedicated management has resulted in the persistence of scrubby flatwoods areas, with drier uplands characterized by an understory of saw palmetto, native shrubs, bunchgrasses, wiregrasses, and native herbs. This upland understory is rich enough to provide very good cover, food, and nesting habitat, while being open enough to allow wildlife movement. The cattle density is low (one per twenty acres), and the cows move throughout the property, reducing midstory overgrowth. Much of the pasture contains old-field conditions.

Aside from quail, the property owners also hunt doves (*Columbidae*), white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), and turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), but take of all species is low. A small amount of Old World climbing fern (*Lygodium microphyllum*) is present in the hardwood hammock habitats, but there is generally a low presence of invasive plants. The land managers spray for cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*) and describe invasive hogs (*Sus scrofa*) as a nuisance they manage as actively as possible.

Many State Threatened gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) burrows were observed, along with several tortoises. Considering this, some commensal species are likely present. The following wildlife was also observed: State Threatened sandhill crane (*Antigone canadensis pratensis*), Bachman's sparrows (*Peucaea aestivalis*, SGCN), red-headed woodpeckers (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*, SGCN) swallow-tailed kites (*Elanoides forficatus*, SGCN), Eastern meadowlarks (*Sturnella magna*, SGCN), black-bellied whistling ducks (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*), great egrets (*Ardea alba*), red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), and white-tailed deer.

The land managers reported that two Federally Threatened species use the property, Florida scrub-jays (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) and crested caracaras, along with sandhill cranes, southern fox squirrels (*Sciurus niger niger*, SGCN), bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), and nine-banded armadillos (*Dasypus novemcinctus*). State Threatened burrowing owls (*Athene cunicularia floridana*) are seen occasionally and were much more common in the past

(pasture old fields), while Florida black bears (*Ursus americanus floridanus*) are rarely seen. Two Federally Endangered Florida panthers (*Puma concolor coryi*) were reported to have used the property over ten years ago. Onsite observations confirmed potential habitat for all the species reported by the land managers.

The FWC Florida Landscape Assessment Model mean score for the proposal is 7.4 (on a 0–10 increasing value scale). The proposal contains designated FWC Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (SHCAs) for three species of varying conservation priority. This includes Priority 3 SHCA (on a 1-5 scale of decreasing priority) for two species, 4,146 acres for the swallow-tailed kite and 200 acres for the Florida mouse (*Peromyscus floridanus*, SGCN). This also includes 4,383 acres of Priority 5 SHCA for the Florida black bear. Onsite observations confirmed potential habitat for all these SHCA species.

In summary, Buzzard Roost would provide excellent conservation value as a less than fee acquisition. This property contains quality upland habitat, intact mesic flatwoods, and a mixture of wetland habitats that together provide a diverse and very valuable mosaic for wildlife, including imperiled and at-risk species. The uplands are particularly well suited for the gopher tortoise and related species. The benefits of the active management of the property on its natural communities are evident, with exemplary wildlife habitat across most of the area. These ongoing management efforts are an indication that the high value of this property for conservation will persist.

GOALS, MEASURES AND CRITERIA

GOAL A:

ENHANCE THE COORDINATION AND COMPLETION OF LAND ACQUISITION PROJECTS

Measure A1:

The number of acres acquired through the state's land acquisition programs that contribute to the enhancement of essential natural resources, ecosystem service parcels, and connecting linkage corridors as identified and developed by the best available scientific data.

If acquired, all 7,059 acres would contribute to ecosystem service parcels and connecting linkage corridors.

Measure A2:

The number of acres protected through the use of alternatives to fee simple acquisition.

The entirety of the project (7,059 acres) is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition via conservation easement.

GOAL B:

INCREASE THE PROTECTION OF FLORIDA'S BIODIVERSITY AT THE SPECIES, NATURAL COMMUNITY, AND LANDSCAPE LEVELS

Measure B1:

The number of acres acquired of significant Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas.

The SHCA Florida Forever Conservation Needs layer identifies important remaining habitat conservation needs for 62 terrestrial vertebrates on private lands. Priority 1 and 2 represent habitat for species considered imperiled or critically imperiled in Florida. The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation (FFME) table (Appendix B) reports the site contains approximately 6,252 acres (89% of site) of Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas. This area is primarily within Priority 3 (59% of site) and Priority 5 (29%), with the remainder in Priority 2 (<1%).

Measure B2:

The number of acres acquired of highest priority conservation areas for Florida's rarest species.

Habitat conservation priorities for 634 of Florida's rarest species were mapped and divided into six priority classes. The FFME reports the proposed project contains approximately 7,049 acres (100% of site) of rare species habitat. The habitat is mostly divided between Priority 4 (59% of site), Priority 5 (20%), and Priority 6 (16%), with the remainder in Priority 3 (< 1%).

The following table lists the acres of habitat for each species that may be found on the site, based on the FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities. Please note that habitats for these species overlap, so that the sum total of habitat for all species is more than the total acreage of the priority conservation areas. Acreage for aquatic species includes a terrestrial buffer.

Table 2. Rare species habitat based on FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	Acres
<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	Florida sandhill crane	G5T2	5,825
<i>Aphelocoma coerulescens</i>	Florida scrub-jay	G1G2	521
<i>Caracara plancus</i>	crested caracara	G5	4,760
<i>Neogale frenata peninsulae</i>	Florida long-tailed weasel	G5T3?	6,289

See Appendix D for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

Measure B3:

The number of acres acquired of significant landscapes, landscape linkages, and conservation corridors, giving priority to completing linkages.

The FFME reports approximately 7,014 acres (99%) of the proposed project contribute to protection of ecological greenways, entirely within Priority 3 areas. Prioritization is based on such factors as importance for wide-ranging species like Florida panther and Florida black bear, importance for maintaining a connected reserve network and riparian corridors.

Measure B4:

The number of acres acquired of under-represented native ecosystems.

The Florida Forever natural community analysis includes only those communities that are under-represented on existing conservation lands. This analysis provides a conservative estimate of the extent of these communities, because it identifies only relatively undisturbed portions of these communities that occur within their historic range. The FFME table lists the acreages of under-represented natural communities found on the site. Based on this analysis, the Buzzard Roost proposal contains 3,464 acres of mesic flatwoods (49% of site), 413 acres of scrubby flatwoods (6%), and 329 acres of wet prairie (5%).

Measure B5:

The number of landscape-sized protection areas of at least 50,000 acres that exhibit a mosaic of predominantly intact or restorable natural communities established through new acquisition projects, or augmentations to previous projects.

The Buzzard Roost proposal, although in the vicinity of several conservation easements monitored by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection Division of State Lands (FDEP DSL) or Southwest Florida Water Management District, would not currently contribute to a contiguous landscape-sized protection area of at least 50,000 acres.

Measure B6:

The percentage increase in the number of occurrences of imperiled species on publicly managed conservation areas.

Two rare animals were observed during the site visit. Five separate instances of foraging gopher tortoises were observed during the afternoon. They were grazing on native or pasture grasses in the two-track roads traversing the upland areas of the site. A single southern fox squirrel was observed in one of the mesic hammocks. Both of these species have abundant high-quality habitat throughout the project.

The only listed plant species observed during the site visit was a Florida butterfly orchid seen in a live oak on the western side of the property. However, there are likely many more individuals in the mesic hammock across the site.

Other rare/imperiled wildlife species have been previously documented on the property (Table 2). Most notably, Florida scrub jay has been documented on the property and is likely still present, although not observed during the site visit. Several wading bird species are also recorded, and a significant wading bird rookery was documented on the property in the 1970s and 1980s. The application reports several other species, all of which are likely to continue to occur based on the conditions onsite. Given the presence of a variety of intact habitats, particularly mesic and scrubby flatwoods, it is highly likely that additional rare species occur on the proposal.

The FFME table lists the number of Element Occurrences by Global Rank (G-rank) that are found on the proposal. Note that the number of occurrences does not necessarily match the number of species in the following table because a) some species may have more than one occurrence on the proposal site, or b) some species observed on site do not meet the criteria for addition to the FNAI database at this time. The table below contains species falling into any of these observational categories, species gleaned from other sources (e.g., Florida Breeding Bird Atlas) with different degrees of locational precision, and species reported in the application or during the site visit.

Table 3. Rare plants and animals documented or reported to occur within the proposed project

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	State Rank	Federal Status	State Status
Rare plants documented on site					
<i>Encyclia tampensis</i>	Florida butterfly orchid	G4†	S3S4	N	CE
Additional rare plants reported on site by applicant					
none					
Rare animals documented on site					
<i>Aphelocoma coerulescens</i>	Florida scrub-jay	G2	S2	T	FT

Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Buzzard Roost PER

<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	little blue heron	G5	S4	N	ST
<i>Egretta thula</i>	snowy egret	G5	S3	N	N
<i>Egretta tricolor</i>	tricolored heron	G5	S4	N	ST
<i>Eudocimus albus</i>	white ibis	G5	S4	N	N
<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	black-crowned night-heron	G5	S3	N	N
<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	glossy ibis	G5	S3	N	N
<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>	gopher tortoise	G3	S3	N	ST
<i>Sciurus niger niger</i>	southern fox squirrel	G5T5	S3	N	N
Additional rare animals reported on site by applicant					
<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	Florida sandhill crane	G5T2	S2	N	ST
<i>Caracara plancus</i>	crested caracara	G5	S2	T	FT
<i>Mycteria americana</i>	wood stork	G4	S2	DL	FT
<i>Platalea ajaja</i>	roseate spoonbill	G5	S2	N	ST

See Appendix D for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

‡Species not tracked by FNAI

GOAL C:

PROTECT, RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE QUALITY OF NATURAL FUNCTIONS OF LAND, WATER AND WETLAND SYSTEMS OF THE STATE

Measure C1:

The number of acres of publicly-owned land identified as needing restoration; enhancement, and management, acres undergoing restoration or enhancement; acres with restoration activities completed, and acres managed to maintain such restored or enhanced conditions; the number of acres which represent actual or potential imperiled species habitat; the number of acres which are available pursuant to a management plan to restore, enhance, repopulate, and manage imperiled species habitat; and the number of acres of imperiled species habitat managed, restored, and enhanced, repopulated, or acquired.

The property is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and is expected to continue being managed with prescribed fire and in a manner consistent with its current use as a wildlife preserve and hunting tract. Most of the intact natural communities — including mesic flatwoods, scrubby flatwoods, wet prairie and marshes — are in good to excellent condition. Continued implementation of frequent prescribed fire is recommended in the pyrogenic upland communities, with fires allowed to naturally creep into and extinguish within adjacent wetlands. Some areas of scrubby flatwoods and wet flatwoods have hardwood encroachment due to fire suppression. In these areas mechanical removal of hardwoods may be necessary to regain ideal community condition.

The property's pastures, wetlands and hammocks provide habitat and movement corridors for several imperiled species, particularly wildlife such as the crested caracara. Restoring the existing pastures to native natural communities could be possible but may conflict with management objectives focused on maintaining pasture productivity for agricultural use.

Invasive plant management needs appear to be minimal. Cogon grass is currently present in small patches, especially in flatwoods along the northern and eastern boundaries but the manager reported that aggressive treatment efforts are ongoing. A few instances of Old-World climbing fern and West Indian marsh grass were seen in the wetter areas including wet prairie and depression marsh. A baseline assessment should be conducted to determine the full extent and distribution of invasive species across the property.

Measure C4:

The number of acres acquired that protect natural floodplain functions.

The FFME reports approximately 2,139 acres (30%) of the proposed project may contribute to the protection of natural floodplain function. This area is mostly divided between Priority 2 (15% of site), Priority 1 (9%), and Priority 3 (6%), with the remainder in Priority 4 (< 1%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C5:

The number of acres acquired that protect surface waters of the State.

The FFME reports approximately 7,051 acres (100%) of the proposed project could provide protection for those surface waters of the State that currently remain in good condition. This area is divided between Priority 5 (57% of site), Priority 3 (32%), Priority 7 (6%) and Priority 6 (5%), with the remainder in Priority 4 (less than 1%). These areas represent acreage that contributes to the protection of state-designated Outstanding Florida Waters, springs, rare fish habitat or other surface waters.

Measure C8:

The number of acres of functional wetland systems protected.

The FFME reports approximately 2,115 acres (30%) of the proposed project would provide protection for functional wetland systems. This area is divided between Priority 2 (15% of site), Priority 1 (9%) and Priority 3 (6%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C11:

The number of acres of public conservation lands in which upland invasive, exotic plants are under maintenance control.

Approximately 6,988 acres were observed to be in maintenance control at the time of site reconnaissance. A few small areas of cogon grass were noted during the site visit and likely cover less than 1% of the site, and a small amount of smut grass (*Sporobolus indicus*) was observed as well.

GOAL D:

ENSURE THAT SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES OF WATER ARE AVAILABLE TO MEET THE CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF NATURAL SYSTEMS AND THE CITIZENS OF THE STATE

Measure D1:

The number of acres acquired which provide retention and storage of surface water in naturally occurring storage areas, such as lakes and wetlands, consistent with the maintenance of water resources or water supplies and consistent with district water supply plans.

The 7,059-acre Buzzard Roost property is located within the Southwest Florida Water Management District's Heartland and Southern Planning Regions for water supply and is within the Southern Water Use Caution Area. The property contains portions of the Buzzard Roost Branch and Brandy Branch, which drain to Horse Creek and ultimately to the Peace River. According to the Florida Forever application, there are 2,118.4 acres of functional wetlands occurring on the property, mainly associated with the Buzzard Roost and Brandy Branch drainages and their accompanying wet prairies and marshes. There are also numerous areas of mixed wetland hardwoods (637 acres) and mixed hardwood-coniferous swamps and wetlands (85 acres). Over 2,100 acres onsite are designated as high-priority natural floodplain.

The Southwest Florida Water Management District's mission is comprised of four main Areas of Responsibility; Water Supply, Water Quality, Natural Systems and Flood Protection. Each area has a goal; Water Supply: Ensure an adequate supply of water to provide for all existing and future reasonable and beneficial uses while protecting and maintaining water resources and related natural systems. Water Quality: Protect and improve water quality to sustain the water resources, environment, economy, and quality of life. Natural Systems: Preserve, protect, and restore natural systems to support their natural hydrologic and ecological functions. Flood Protection: Minimize flood damage to protect people, property, infrastructure and investment. This property contributes to three of four Areas of Responsibilities, Water Quality 63%, Natural Systems 89%, and Flood Protection 30%.

Measure D3:

The number of acres acquired of groundwater recharge areas critical to springs, sinks, aquifers, other natural systems, or water supply.

The FFME reports approximately 7,061 acres (100%) of the proposed project would provide protection for groundwater recharge areas. This area is mostly divided between Priority 4 (55% of site), Priority 3 (25%), Priority 5 (14%), and Priority 2 (6%), with the remainder in Priority 6 (<1%). Prioritization is based on features that contribute to aquifer vulnerability such as swallets, thickness of the intermediate aquifer confining unit and closed topographical depressions, as well as areas within springshed protection zones and in proximity to public water supply wells.

Table 4. Spatial Analysis for Potential Water Quality Benefits of Buzzard Roost

Categories	Scoring Criteria	Project Score
FDEP High Profile Springs (In 1,2,3 or > spring sheds)	12, 24, 36	
FDEP Select Agricultural Land Use (0-30%, >30-65%, >65%)	4,8,12	4
FDEP Florida Aquifer Vulnerability (FAVA)	4,7,10	7
FDEP Special Nutrient Impaired WBIDs	9	9
FDEP Distance to Major Lakes (100, 500, 1000 meters)	8,7,6	
FDEP Springsheds or within 5 miles	10, 7	
FDEP BMAPs	10	
FDEP Distance to Major Rivers (100, 500, 1000 meters)	6,5,4	4
Total Possible	101	24

GIS Evaluation score is converted to a 1 to 5 value (low to high)

FINAL DEAR SCORE = 2, medium low water quality protection benefits

GOAL E:

INCREASE NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED PUBLIC RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Measure E1:

The number of acres acquired that are available for natural resource-based public recreation or education.

Zero acres, as this site is slated for less-than-fee purchase. However, the current landowners may be open to hosting Operation Outdoor Freedom events for disabled Veterans, administered through the Florida Forest Service.

Measure E2:

The miles of trails that are available for public recreation, giving priority to those that provide significant connections including those that will assist in completing the Florida National Scenic Trail.

The FFME reports that no portions of the land trail priorities and opportunities identified by the Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan (2023 update) come within a quarter mile of the proposal.

GOAL F:

PRESERVE SIGNIFICANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL OR HISTORIC SITES

Measure F1:

The increase in the number of and percentage of historic and archaeological properties listed in the Florida Master Site File or National Register of Historic Places which are protected or preserved for public use.

The Buzzard Roost Florida Forever Project would not meet Measure F1 as the project contains no cultural resources listed in the Florida Master Site File or National Register of Historic Places.

Measure F2:

The increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in state ownership.

Acquisition of the Buzzard Roost Florida Forever Project would not meet Measure F2, as it would not result in an increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in state ownership.

CULTURAL RESOURCES:

According to the Division of Historical Resource's (DHR) Florida Master Site File, there are no recorded cultural resources within the boundary of the Buzzard Roost Florida Forever Project.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS:

DHR staff did not observe any historical resources on the property during the field review. Should any artifacts or other cultural resources be discovered in the future, DHR recommends leaving them in place and contacting DHR's Public Lands Archaeology Program for further evaluation.

GOAL G:

INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF FORESTLAND AVAILABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Measure G1:

The number of acres acquired that are available for sustainable forest management.

Approximately 15% of the site, or 700 acres, of semi-improved pasture could be reforested and managed sustainably. The property was observed to have great natural pine regeneration. During site reconnaissance, it was noted areas could use some thinning and future timber harvests beneficial for forest health and tree volume growth, and scrub areas could benefit from more prescribed fire, but in summary it is a well-managed property including regular use

of prescribed burns. Currently onsite has high potential for highly productive timberland and it currently contains a large amount of harvestable volume.

The FFME reports approximately 3,919 acres (56% of site) could be available for sustainable forest management, divided between Priority 2 (2,213 acres), Priority 3 (878 acres), Priority 4 (773 acres), and Priority 5 (55 acres). Prioritization is based on eight criteria set by the Florida Forest Service: whether trees are natural or planted, size of tract, distance to market, average total height that dominant and codominant pine trees obtain, access/operability, burn frequency, years since last burn and landscape integrity.

Measure G2:

The number of acres of state-owned forestland managed for economic return in accordance with current best management practices.

This property is slated for conservation easement. The current landowner manages approximately 5,900 acres for economic return utilizing silvicultural Best Management Practices.

Measure G4:

The percentage and number of acres identified for restoration restored by reforestation.

Approximately 700 acres of semi-improved pasture is suitable for upland habitat scrub and mesic flatwoods restoration.

CRITERIA

The proposed project meets the following Florida Forever criteria (§ 259.105, F.S.)

- (9)
 - (a) The project meets multiple goals described in subsection (4).
 - (b) The project is part of an ongoing governmental effort to restore, protect, or develop land areas or water resources.
 - (f) The project contributes to the solution of water resource problems on a regional basis.
 - (g) The project has a significant portion of its land area in imminent danger of development, in imminent danger of losing its significant natural attributes or recreational open space, or in imminent danger of subdivision which would result in multiple ownership and make acquisition of the project costly or less likely to be accomplished.
 - (k) The project may be acquired, in whole or in part, using alternatives to fee simple, including but not limited to, tax incentives, mitigation funds, or other revenues, the purchase of development rights, hunting rights, agricultural or silvicultural rights, or mineral rights or obtaining conservation easements or flowage easements.
- (10) The Acquisition and Restoration Council shall give increased priority to:
 - (c) projects that can be acquired in less than fee ownership, such as a permanent conservation easement;
 - (d) projects that contribute to improving the quality and quantity of surface water and groundwater;
 - (h) projects located within the Florida Wildlife Corridor as defined in s. 259.1055(4)

MANAGEMENT

If acquired as a perpetual conservation easement, the primary management responsibility would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management would occur to

confirm continued compliance with the conditions of the easement. Monitoring would be coordinated by the Office of Environmental Services within the FDEP's DSL.

FUNDING SOURCES

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

FUNDING FOR MAPPING, APPRAISAL, NEGOTIATIONS & CLOSING

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

OWNERSHIP PATTERN AND ACQUISITION PLANNING

Title and Legal Access Issues, Jurisdictional and Sovereignty Lands, Legal Issues

Record of title, a designation of jurisdictional and sovereignty lands and any other legal issues will be determined at the time of acquisition and are not known at this time.

Known Encumbrances (easement, long-term leases, restrictive covenants, etc.)

The easements and encumbrances of record would be determined during the appraisal mapping. A current title commitment would be obtained, or the owner's title insurance policy would be depicted or noted on the appraisal map.

Description and location of hazardous waste sites, dumps, borrow pits

There are no apparent contamination sites within the project based on the application form.

Estimated Cost of Appraisal and Mapping

FDEP Bureau of Appraisal estimates \$10,000 to \$20,000 in appraisal fees.

Acquisition Phases

Subject to funding, the Buzzard Roost Florida Forever project will be phased based upon price.

GOVERNMENT PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT

Contribution to Recreation and Open Space Needs

The property is currently proposed for less-than-fee acquisition through a conservation easement. As a result, public access and recreational uses are currently limited on site. The acquisition would directly protect the natural resources and functions of the area that contribute to agricultural needs, water quality, floodplain storage, and preservation of wildlife habitats.

Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Spaces

Moderate Potential: Given the overall potential for subdivision, conversion, and/or development, the property would be at a moderate risk of losing significant floodplain functions, wetlands, and wildlife habitats. The acquisition of Buzzard Roost Ranch would aid in connecting the Quail Creek Farms conservation easement and the Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever project, furthering the protection of the environment and natural resources of the area. Additionally, Buzzard Roost Branch and Brandy Branch converge into Horse Creek, south of the property, making it a crucial tributary in the area. Over 2,100 acres of the property function as natural floodplain and high priority wetlands that capture, filter, and slowly release water into these creeks before it flows on to the Peace River and the Charlotte Harbor Estuary of National Significance. This contributes to the supply of drinking water to downstream residents.

Potential for Being Subdivided

Low-moderate Potential: Considering the existing future land use of the area, the population, and its proximity to State Road 70, the potential for subdivision or conversion to other uses is low to moderate. According to the medium County projection estimates (Florida Demographic Estimating Conference and BEBR), by 2045 DeSoto County is expected to grow by approximately 10%, and Hardee County is projected to have a relatively stable population. Buzzard Roost is located in close proximity to State Road 70, making it a strong location for new subdivisions or rural estate developments. The surrounding properties are all designated as Agriculture or Rural/Agriculture.

Zoning and Densities within the Project Boundaries

The subject property is within Hardee County's Agricultural District (A-1) and DeSoto County's Agriculture 10 District (A-10). The A-1 District is intended to provide areas for unlimited agriculture, low density residential, low intensity commercial services, industrial, public and community services, and recreation and opens space land uses. The A-10 District is intended for agricultural, pastoral, the extraction or processing of non-phosphate minerals, and low-density residential development. Additionally, the intent of these zoning districts is to prevent the creation of conditions which would endanger, damage, or destroy the agricultural, environmental, potable water supply, and wildlife resources of the area. While non-residential uses are permitted for the area, they are primarily aligned to supplement agricultural uses.

Existing Land Uses and Future Land Use Designations

Existing Land Uses: The site contains minimal structures, is largely undeveloped, and is primarily used for agricultural purposes such as cattle ranching and timberlands. The undeveloped land area serves as habitat for several listed native species of fauna.

Future Land Use Designation: The subject property is within the Agriculture and Agriculture/Rural Future Land Use Map (FLUM) categories for Hardee County and DeSoto County, respectively. The Agriculture and Agriculture/Rural FLUM categories are primarily intended for agricultural activities and related uses, as well as minimal residential uses. Both categories emphasize the protection of agricultural lands, wildlife, and habitats.

The DeSoto County Rural/Agriculture FLUM category has a maximum density of one dwelling unit per 10 acres and a maximum Floor Area Ratio of 0.4. The maximum residential density developable in the DeSoto County tract is 169 dwelling units. The Hardee County Agriculture FLUM category has a maximum of one dwelling unit per five acres. The maximum residential density developable in the Hardee County tract is approximately 1,074 dwelling units. This amounts to a combined residential density of approximately 1,243 dwelling units.

Development Potential

Moderate Potential: The development potential of the property is moderate. Under current zoning, the A-1 allows for a maximum density of 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres, and the A-10 allows for a maximum density of 1 dwelling unit per 10 acres. This is not conducive for large or dense development. While the scale of these tracts may allow for a high number of developable dwelling units and nonresidential floor area, the relative developable density and intensity of the site is low. Additionally, existing developments in the area are minimal, aligning to the appropriate use of the property. However, the property has been the subject of attention for large-scale phosphate mining operations, as the site is abutting a mining overlay. Phosphate extraction entails the clearing of vegetation, topsoil and excavating open pits which

can change the character of the land. Additionally, former ranchlands have consistently been sought out for utility scale solar farms. The proliferation of solar farms may result in a significant reduction of land for agricultural production and fragment wildlife habitat.

Transportation Planning Issues

The proposed project is located in the Florida Department of Transportation District 1 between DeSoto and Hardee County, along the Manatee County border. A majority of the roadways near this project are located within rural areas dominated by agricultural and natural habitats. State Road (SR) 70 is approximately 2 miles south, SR 35/U.S. Highway 17 is less than 11 miles east of the parcel and an active Atlantic Coast rail main line less than 6 miles directly east border are all Strategic Intermodal System facilities but will not have an impact on the roadway or any plans that could be impacted in the future. SR 70 and SR 35/U.S. Highway 17 are both designated evacuation routes.

The entire proposed project and its surrounding area is a Florida Wildlife Corridor. Buzzard Roost is situated between multiple secondary wildlife crossings. One crossing is a bridge with large wildlife shelves on both sides of SR 64 over Horse Creek and is utilized by large mammals. The crossing is directly north of the property and Horse Creek follows southeast of the property. The other crossing is SR 70 over the Myakka River. It also has a bridge with wide wildlife shelves on both sides of the river. This crossing is due west of the property. Further away along the southeast portion of the property, there are a cluster of three secondary crossings on SR 70. These crossings are just to the east of Buzzard Roost Branch, which goes through the property and crosses SR 70. There are no funded, planned additional wildlife crossings in the vicinity. To the northeast of the property, there is an additional un-funded and uncommitted wildlife crossing on SR 64 at Brushy Creek. No design or construction plans or funds currently exist.

While Florida Department of Transportation finds no adverse impacts to the proposed project at this time, coordination with Florida Department of Transportation's District 1 staff during the acquisition process is recommended to address any transportation system issues that may arise in the future and incorporate them into the management plan as appropriate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Staff in FDEP's DSL and FNAI determined the final project recommendations. Diana Pepe and Katie Ramirez in DSL's Office of Environmental Services were responsible for the overall coordination of this report, with contributions from the following:

- Division of Historical Resources: Brandon Ackermann
- Florida Forest Service: Cat Ingram and Richard Larsen
- Florida Natural Areas Inventory: Amy Jenkins and Gwen Iacona
- Department of Commerce: Yazmin Valdez and David Pullin
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: Steve Shattler, Dean Cox, and Donna Marain
- DEP Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration: Moira Homann and Kenneth Weaver
- Florida Department of Transportation: Emily Rhodes
- Southwest Water Management District: Mark Maggard

APPENDICES**Appendix A:**

Final FF measures table: Report requirement 259.105 (15)d, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

Buzzard Roost: Florida Forever Measures Evaluation 20260725

GIS ACRES = 7,061

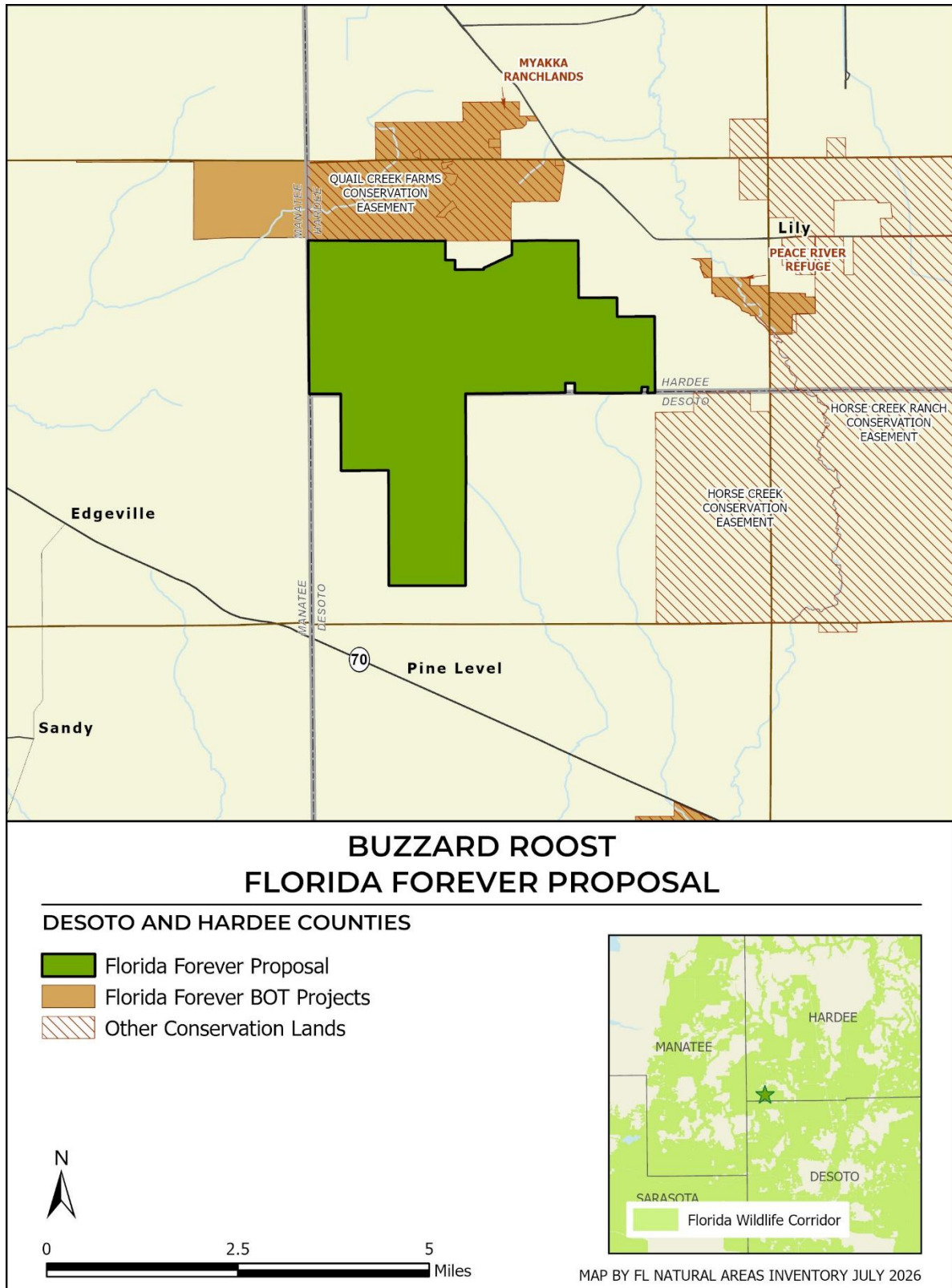
MEASURES	Resource Acres ²	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	14	< 1%
Priority 3	4,160	59%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	2,078	29%
Total Acres	6,252	89%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	353	5%
Priority 4	4,159	59%
Priority 5	1,385	20%
Priority 6	1,152	16%
Total Acres	7,049	100%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	7,014	99%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	0	0%
Total Acres	7,014	99%
B4: Under-represented Natural Communities		
Upland Glade (G1)	0	0%
Pine Rockland (G1)	0	0%
Scrub and Scrubby Flatwoods (G2)	413	6%
Rockland Hammock (G2)	0	0%
Dry Prairie (G2)	0	0%
Seepage Slope (G2)	0	0%
Sandhill (G3)	0	0%
Sandhill Upland Lake (G3)	0	0%
Upland Pine (G3)	0	0%
Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4)	3,567	51%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	0	0%
Total Acres	3,980	56%
B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species		
G1	0	
G2	1	
G3	1	
G4	0	
G5	7	
Total	9	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	625	9%
Priority 2	1,065	15%
Priority 3	439	6%
Priority 4	9	< 1%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	2,139	30%

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres ²	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	2,261	32%
Priority 4	29	< 1%
Priority 5	3,994	57%
Priority 6	330	5%
Priority 7	438	6%
Total Acres	7,051	100%
C7: Fragile Coastal Resources		
Fragile Coastal Uplands	0	0%
Imperiled Coastal Lakes	0	0%
Coastal Wetlands	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
C8: Functional Wetlands		
Priority 1	639	9%
Priority 2	1,051	15%
Priority 3	424	6%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	2,115	30%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	421	6%
Priority 3	1,759	25%
Priority 4	3,888	55%
Priority 5	971	14%
Priority 6	22	< 1%
Total Acres	7,061	100%
E2: Recreational Trails (miles)		
(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)		
Land Trail Priorities	0.0	
Land Trail Opportunities	0.0	
Total Miles	0.0	
F2: Arch. & Historical Sites (number)		
	0 sites	
G1: Sustainable Forestry		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	2,213	31%
Priority 3	878	12%
Priority 4	773	11%
Priority 5	55	< 1%
Total Acres	3,919	56%
G3: Forestland for Recharge		
	1,253	18%

*Acres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted. This analysis converts site boundary into pixels, which causes slight differences from GIS acres; this effect is most noticeable on small sites.

Appendix B:

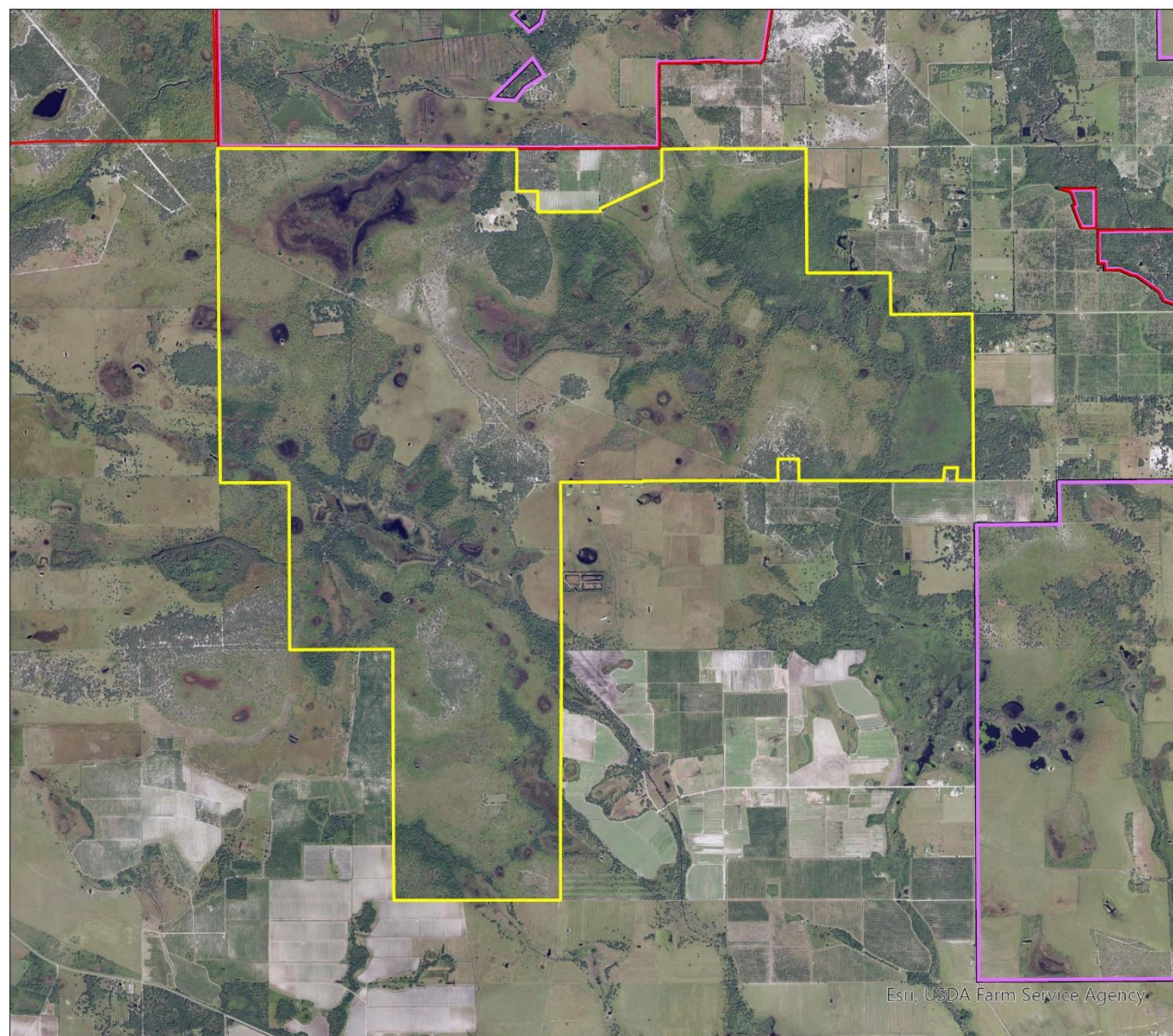
Final FF proposal boundary maps: Report requirement 259.105 (15)k, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

B1: Florida Forever map

B2: Aerial map

BUZZARD ROOST FLORIDA FOREVER PROPOSAL

FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSAL BOUNDARY AS OF JULY 2026

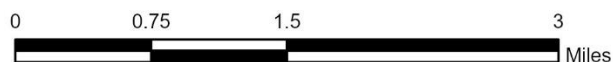


Map Produced by: FL Natural Areas Inventory, N. Pasco, July 2026

Background: USDA NAIP Imagery



- Florida Forever Proposal Boundary
- Florida Forever BOT Projects
- Existing Private Conservation Lands



Appendix C:**PROPERTY ID #'S FOR FINAL RECOMMENDED BOUNDARY**

County	Parcel ID	Owner	Acres	Just (Market) Value	Parcel Designation
Hardee	0736230000100100000	HRS Buzzard Roost LLC	660.39	\$4,568,500	Essential
Hardee	0836230000056200000	HRS Buzzard Roost LLC	601.41	\$4,306,000	Essential
Hardee	0936230000053100000	HRS Buzzard Roost LLC	508.68	\$3,958,100	Essential
Hardee	1036230000025000000	HRS Buzzard Roost LLC	398.42	\$3,145,083	Essential
Hardee	1436230000025500000	HRS Buzzard Roost LLC	309.55	\$1,642,800	Essential
Hardee	1536230000100100000	HRS Buzzard Roost LLC	628.67	\$4,767,300	Essential
Hardee	1636230000100100000	HRS Buzzard Roost LLC	630.40	\$5,039,000	Essential
Hardee	1736230000100100000	HRS Buzzard Roost LLC	643.34	\$5,033,916	Essential
Hardee	1836230000100100000	HRS Buzzard Roost LLC	661.43	\$5,117,000	Essential
DeSoto	1936230000002000000	HRS Buzzard Roost LLC	398.48	\$1,800,000	Essential
DeSoto	2036230000001000000	HRS Buzzard Roost LLC	652	\$2,925,000	Essential
DeSoto	2936230000001000000	HRS Buzzard Roost LLC	642.92	\$2,880,000	Essential
DeSoto	3236230000002000000	HRS Buzzard Roost LLC	323.15	\$1,440,000	Essential
		TOTAL	7,058.86	\$46,622,699	

Appendix D:

Imperiled Species FNAI Ranking Definitions

FNAI GLOBAL ELEMENT RANK

- G1** = Critically imperiled globally because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- G2** = Imperiled globally because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- G3** = Either very rare and local throughout its range (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.
- G4** = Apparently secure globally (may be rare in parts of range).
- G5** = Demonstrably secure globally.
- GH** = Of historical occurrence throughout its range, may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).
- GX** = Believed to be extinct throughout range.
- GXC** = Extirpated from the wild but still known from captivity or cultivation.
- G#?** = Tentative rank (e.g., G2?).
- G#G#** = Range of rank; insufficient data to assign specific global rank (e.g., G2G3).
- G#T#** = Rank of a taxonomic subgroup such as a subspecies or variety; the G portion of the rank refers to the entire species and the T portion refers to the specific subgroup; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G3T1).
- G#Q** = Rank of questionable species - ranked as species but questionable whether it is species or subspecies; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G2Q).
- G#T#Q** = Same as above, but validity as subspecies or variety is questioned.
- GU** = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned (e.g., GUT2).
- GNA** = Ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).
- GNR** = Element not yet ranked (temporary).
- GNRTNR** = Neither the element nor the taxonomic subgroup has yet been ranked.

FNAI STATE ELEMENT RANK

- S1** = Critically imperiled in Florida because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- S2** = Imperiled in Florida because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- S3** = Either very rare and local in Florida (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.
- S4** = Apparently secure in Florida (may be rare in parts of range).
- S5** = Demonstrably secure in Florida.
- SH** = Of historical occurrence in Florida, possibly extirpated, but may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).
- SX** = Believed to be extirpated throughout Florida.
- SU** = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned.
- SNA** = State ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).
- SNR** = Element not yet ranked (temporary).

Appendix E:
Site Visit Photos



Mesic flatwoods





Florida Forever Project Evaluation Report

Chamonix Leon County



Acquisition Type: Less-Than-Fee

Acres: 961

Just Value: \$6,755,486

Application Date: April 15, 2026

Project Sponsors: Tall Timbers

Prepared By:

Division of State Lands

Office of Environmental Services



Submitted to the Acquisition and Restoration Council

October 9, 2026

Executive Summary

The Chamonix Florida Forever proposal contains eight parcels owned by Chamonix Plantation LLC, totaling approximately 961 acres in Leon County. The property is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition with a tax assessed value of \$6,755,486.

The proposal is currently used for cattle, silviculture and agriculture; and historically used for cotton production. The landowners are working to restore the natural communities, burning about 40% of the property each year and treating invasive plant species. Restoration upland pine is the most common community type found on site. The landowners are managing the property for northern bobwhite quail (*Colinus virginianus*) and wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*).

Chamonix is situated between other conservation easements held by Tall Timbers. This proposal will contribute to a network of public and private conservation easements spanning the Red Hills region, characterized by rolling uplands, isolated lakes and depressional wetlands. Upland vegetation in the region primarily resembles the upland pine natural community, although much of this was altered historically to support agriculture, primarily cotton.

The property lies within the Upper Wakulla River and Wakulla Spring Basin Management Action Plan. This plan is designed to protect the water quality and quantity of Wakulla Spring, the Wakulla River, the St. Marks River, and Apalachee Bay. Chamonix will contribute to the goals of the Basin Management Action Plan by protecting surface waters, helping to ensure the minimum flow for the St. Marks River Rise, and contributing to aquifer recharge.

The entire Chamonix proposal is within Priority 2 of the Florida Wildlife Corridor, which aims to protect linkage corridors for rare, imperiled, and long-ranging species. As such, a variety of these species have been reported or documented on site, including; the Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*), Bachman's sparrow (*Peucaea aestivalis*), southern fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger niger*) and southern lady fern (*Athyrium asplenoides*). Additionally, the project lies within the Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape, a regional partnership planning boundary focused on coastal resilience and land stewardship by minimizing threats to military installations across the panhandle.

If approved for addition to the 2027 Florida Forever Priority List, the proposal should be considered as an addition to the Red Hills Conservation project in the Less-Than-Fee category. All ±961 acres proposed for acquisition are considered essential due to the resources documented on the property (see Appendix C). An interagency team conducted a site visit to the property on June 18, 2026. Information included in this report is a result of this site visit.

PURPOSE FOR ACQUISITION

The Chamonix proposal would help conserve a working cattle ranch and timber operation in the Red Hills region. Additionally, conservation of the property would contribute to the protection of sensitive surface and groundwater resources associated with Wakulla Springs. Chamonix would support the responsible stewardship of a rural landscape along with restoration of former agricultural lands to historic upland pine.

Acquisition of this project would meet the following Florida Forever Goals, Criteria and Priorities:

Goal	Criteria		Priority	
A ☒	(a) ☒	(h) ☐	(a) ☐	(h) ☒
B ☒	(b) ☒	(i) ☐	(b) ☐	
C ☒	(c) ☐	(j) ☐	(c) ☒	
D ☒	(d) ☒	(k) ☒	(d) ☒	
E ☐	(e) ☐	(l) ☐	(e) ☒	
F ☐	(f) ☒		(f) ☒	
G ☒	(g) ☐		(g) ☐	
H ☐				
I ☒				

*Projects proposed to be funded pursuant to Section 259.105(3)(b), F.S., must meet at least one of the criteria outlined under Section 259.105(9), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0021, F.A.C., and shall meet at least two of the Florida Forever goals and measures outlined in Section 259.105(4), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0022, F.A.C.

LOCATION AND PROXIMITY TO OTHER MANAGED AREAS

The Chamonix Florida Forever proposal is ca. 961 acres in northeastern Leon County. This land consists of a contiguous tract under single ownership that is proposed for less-than-fee protection via a conservation easement.

The Chamonix proposal is a triangular property with two narrow southerly extensions, with one small parcel separated from the rest by ca. 0.2 miles. The property lies approximately 10 miles northeast of Tallahassee and 5 miles west of Lake Miccosukee. The property extends between Miccosukee Road (County Road 146) and Mahan Drive, with about two miles of frontage on Miccosukee Road and approximately 350 feet of frontage on Mahan Drive. The Chamonix proposal is a portion of a larger holding that is already partially under easement, and the proposal's eastern and southern boundaries completely adjoin the Chemonie Plantation Conservation Easement. Some 41 conservation areas – mainly easements – lie within 10 miles, including a large block of managed lands to the north, contiguous with Tall Timbers

Research Station. The proposal is adjacent to unacquired lands in the Red Hills Conservation Florida Forever project to the north, and additional lands in this project make up much of the intervening acreage between the proposal and Lake Miccosukee.

RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

Florida Natural Areas Inventory

This evaluation is based on field observations, as well as information gathered from the proposal, aerial photography, US Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5' topographic maps, Cooperative Land Cover data (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission [FWC] and Florida Natural Areas Inventory [FNAI], Florida Cooperative Land Cover Map, version 4.0), the FNAI Natural Heritage database and other publicly available GIS data sources. A field survey was conducted on June 18, 2026, by the Acquisition and Restoration Council liaison staff, including FNAI biologists Gwen Iacona and Allie Heiker.

The Chamonix proposal is in a region characterized by uplands crossed by well-developed dendritic stream systems. The property lies on an upland ridge between Black Creek to the west and an unnamed creek to the east, both of which feed the St. Marks River, which empties to the Gulf. There is active karst erosion in this region, making it significant for aquifer recharge. Active sinkholes are reported in the application. Along an escarpment just to the south, it is common for streams to disappear into swallets and flow underground for some of their length.

The main portion of the property has two hills that rise to a maximum of about 200 feet above sea level, separated and surrounded by lower areas, with the minimum elevation on the proposal at about 70 feet. Surface drainage is mainly southeastward through the center of the property, with Cody Pond draining to Shemonie Lake and eastward off the property. An area of swamp at the northern tip of the proposal, separated by a hill from the central drainage, is connected to the creek system to the east.

Most of the property consists of pine-dominated uplands. Although these areas have a history of agricultural disturbance, much of the uplands (46% of the proposal) are currently being restored to upland pine through reintroducing a recurrent prescribed fire regime along with other land management practices (e.g., disking) for game management (northern bobwhite quail, wild turkey, etc.). Current management practices have resulted in a savanna structure with widely spaced trees, low-stature shrubs and midstory, and a dense herbaceous layer. The characteristically open canopy is dominated by loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) and shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*) with other scattered hardwoods, including southern red oak (*Quercus falcata*), common persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) and mockernut hickory (*Carya tomentosa*). Occasional subcanopy trees include younger canopy species along with flowering dogwood (*Benthameidia florida*). The shrub layer is generally diverse including canopy and subcanopy species along with winged sumac (*Rhus copallinum* var. *copallinum*), sand blackberry (*Rubus cuneifolius*), American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*), elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*), sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), Chickasaw plum (*Prunus angustifolia*), eastern wild black cherry (*Prunus serotina* var. *serotina*), sand post oak (*Quercus margaretiae*), water oak (*Quercus nigra*), post oak (*Quercus stellata*) and pecan (*Carya illinoensis*). Across much of the site the herbaceous groundcover primarily consists of species that indicate past agricultural soil disturbance, such as Canada goldenrod (*Solidago altissima* var. *pluricephala*), dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*), common ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*) and coffeeweed (*Senna*

obtusifolia). However, in several areas where upland pine graded down into other communities, a diverse suite of remnant upland pine species suggested that some areas had never been intensively farmed. In these areas the diverse suite of species includes partridge pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*), showy milkwort (*Asemeia grandiflora*), switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*), velvetleaf tick-trefoil (*Desmodium viridiflorum*), sunflower (*Helianthus* sp.), spurred butterfly pea (*Centrosema virginianum*), panicked tick-trefoil (*Desmodium paniculatum* var. *paniculatum*), narrowleaf lespedeza (*Lespedeza angustifolia*), butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*), whitemouth dayflower (*Commelina erecta* var. *angustifolia*), pinebarren flatsedge (*Cyperus ovatus*), Florida tick-trefoil (*Desmodium floridanum*), witchgrass (*Dichanthelium* sp.), oblongleaf twinflower (*Dyschoriste oblongifolia*), fleabane (*Erigeron* sp.), coralbean (*Erythrina herbacea*), coastalplain crownbeard (*Verbesina aristata*), tailed bracken (*Pteridium pseudocaudatum*), doubleform snoutbean (*Rhynchosia difformis*), sweet goldenrod (*Solidago odora*) and spiked hoary-pea (*Tephrosia spicata*), among others. Vines include man-of-the-earth (*Ipomoea pandurata*), earleaf greenbriar (*Smilax auriculata*), grape (*Vitis* sp.), trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*) and muscadine (*Muscadinia rotundifolia*).

One dense monoculture of cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*, classified as a Category I invasive by the Florida Invasive Species Council [FISC]), a single patch of Japanese climbing fern (*Lygodium japonicum*, FISC-I), and a single stand of Chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*, FISC-II) were documented in restoration upland pine areas. Historically, shrubby lespedeza (*Lespedeza bicolor*) was intentionally planted in these areas as a food source for bobwhite quail and dominates the understory in some places.

Other natural forested areas on the site make up about 3% of the proposal acreage; these areas consist of upland hardwood forests at higher elevations grading into bottomland forests and basin swamps in areas that are occasionally or regularly flooded. A single intact upland hardwood forest grading into an artificial pond in the southwestern portion of the contiguous property contains a diverse suite of species in the canopy and subcanopy layer, including red maple (*Acer rubrum*), mockernut hickory, common persimmon, sweetbay (*Magnolia virginiana* var. *australis*), southern bayberry (*Morella cerifera*), sourwood (*Oxydendrum arboreum*), white oak (*Quercus alba*), and water oak. The shrub layer is dominated by an azalea (*Rhododendron*) species along with younger canopy and subcanopy trees as well as devil's walkingstick (*Aralia spinosa*), smallflower pawpaw (*Asimina parviflora*), St. Andrew's cross (*Hypericum hypericoides*), Elliott's blueberry (*Vaccinium elliotii*), and deerberry (*Vaccinium stamineum*). The herbaceous layer contains smooth tick-trefoil (*Desmodium laevigatum*), elephantsfoot (*Elephantopus* sp.), royal fern (*Osmunda spectabilis*), cinnamon fern (*Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*) and tailed bracken. Occasional sarsaparilla vine (*Smilax pumila*) was seen growing throughout.

The few depression marshes on site are relatively intact, containing species such as Virginia buttonweed (*Diodia virginiana*), pale meadowbeauty (*Rhexia mariana*), bluestem (*Andropogon* sp.), bulrush (*Scirpus* sp.) and smartweed (*Persicaria* sp.), with the edges containing some shrub species such as common buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), St. John's wort (*Hypericum* sp.), sweetgum and swamp tupelo (*Nyssa biflora*). The FISC Category II invasive species rattlebox (*Sesbania punicea*) was documented growing along the edge of a single depression marsh on site.

A few areas on site, historically upland hardwood forest and upland pine, have progressed into successional hardwood forest due to long-term fire exclusion (10% of proposal acreage). Despite this, many of these areas still contain relict canopy and subcanopy species. Trees include red maple, flowering dogwood, live oak, sweetgum, loblolly pine, southern red oak, swamp laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*), water oak, American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana* var. *caroliniana*), pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*), pecan, common persimmon, eastern hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*) and American holly (*Ilex opaca*), among others. Other shrub species indicative of minimal disturbance include devil's walkingstick, smallflower pawpaw, paw paw (*Asimina spatulata*), sparkleberry (*Vaccinium arboreum*), Elliott's blueberry and deerberry, among others. Some herbaceous species remain in pockets, including woodoats (*Chasmanthium* sp.), partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*), ebony spleenwort (*Asplenium platyneuron*), netted chain fern (*Lorinseria areolata*) and Canada goldenrod. Vines are frequent and include species such as trumpet creeper, Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*), peppervine (*Nekemias arborea*), purple passion-flower (*Passiflora incarnata*), cat greenbriar (*Smilax glauca*), Huger's carrionflower (*Smilax hugeri*), roundleaf greenbriar (*Smilax rotundifolia*) and eastern poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans* var. *radicans*).

There are several artificial ponds on the property, at least some of which result from the impoundment of water. Cody Pond, near the proposal's western edge, is a permanent lake, while Shemonie Lake near the southeastern corner consists of a series of shallower impoundments.

Improved pasture areas make up about 10% of the proposal, mainly near the northern end of the property. These areas are dominated by centipede grass (*Eremochloa ophiuroides*) and bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*). There are also numerous groupings of planted pines and linear wildlife food plots planted side by side in alternating strips; these are interspersed throughout the uplands. The pine plantations make up ca. 10% of the site, and wildlife clearings account for about 6%. The pine plantations on site have a similar suite of species as the restoration upland pine areas, but with slightly denser stands of trees. The wildlife clearings are dominated by common ragweed and Canada goldenrod, with young seedlings of winged sumac and common persimmon periodically growing in.

A handful of developed areas (2% of the proposal) occur on the northern half of the site; these contain a few single-family homes as well as secondary structures, pole barns and other outbuildings.

Table 1. Natural communities and landcover types within Florida Forever proposal

Community or Landcover	Acres	Percent of Proposal
restoration upland pine	442	46
upland hardwood forest	17	2
basin swamp	6	<1
depression marsh	2	<1
bottomland forest	<1	<1
successional hardwood forest	100	10
pasture-improved	97	10
pine plantation	93	10
artificial pond	86	9
clearing/regeneration	55	6
developed	23	2

abandoned field/abandoned pasture	21	2
utility corridor	11	1
successional hydric shrubland/forest	5	<1
road	2	<1
Total	960	100

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

This summary provides an assessment of fish and wildlife resources associated with the Chamonix Florida Forever less than fee proposal, based on field observations during the July 18, 2026, site visit, and on associated GIS analysis and review of species population and status resources.

The vast majority of the upland pine habitat is used for quail hunting. A relatively low basal area of trees is maintained through periodic timber harvest, with approximately one-third burned every year to ensure the one-to-three-year fire return interval for upland pine is met. These well managed areas have a rich native groundcover and midstory below shortleaf, loblolly, slash (*Pinus elliotii*), and longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*). As sectional clearcutting was abandoned, longleaf pine has been underplanted to replace selectively harvested trees. These underplantings occurred in 2009, 2010, and 2018. The midstory of these communities has not compromised their open nature.

About 40 years ago, hardwoods were also planted in strips in a few areas. These have since been thinned twice. These areas, and the natural hardwood communities on Chamonix also exhibit good groundcover and include tree species such as southern red oak, pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*), and live oak.

There was a relatively low presence of invasive plants on the property. The land manager reported that cogongrass was being treated along Baum Road. Japanese climbing fern, coral ardisia (*Ardisia crenata*), and showy rattlebox were also observed in patches, particularly along roadways where invasive plant seeds and propagules commonly spread from vehicles and equipment. A minimal amount of rooting from wild hogs (*Sus scrofa*) was also observed.

Imperiled, at risk and common species were observed on the property. Five potentially active gopher tortoise burrows (*Gopherus polyphemus*; State-designated Threatened) were observed along a forest edge and fenceline in an open area that may have received some sandy fill. The size of the burrows indicated they belonged to older adult tortoises, suggesting this may be a remnant population or a subset of a larger population that continues onto neighboring lands. The property contained a rich variety of avian species that were both seen and heard throughout the site visit, including State Threatened little blue heron (*Egretta caerulea*), northern bobwhites (state Species of Greatest Conservation Need [SGCN]), white-breasted nuthatches (*Sitta carolinensis*; SGCN), Bachman's sparrows (*Peucaea aestivalis*; SGCN), blue grosbeaks (*Passerina caerulea*), indigo buntings (*Passerina cyanea*), pine warblers (*Setophaga pinus*), summer tanagers (*Piranga rubra*), pileated woodpeckers (*Dryocopus pileatus*), eastern kingbirds (*Tyrannus tyrannus*), common ground doves (*Columbina passerina*), red-tailed hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*), and cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*). Bachman's sparrows were heard calling throughout the pine uplands. Bachman's sparrows are a common indicator species for healthy pine management and will abandon habitats after approximately

three years without fire. The presence of Bachman's sparrows on Chamonix is indicative of good land management. White-tailed deer tracks (*Odocoileus virginianus*) were also observed, along with a black racer (*Coluber constrictor*).

The property owner reported past sightings of red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*), gray foxes (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) and bobcats (*Lynx rufus*). FNAI has also recently (2022) documented Florida black bears on Chamonix. Some habitat that could be used opportunistically by these four mammal species was observed.

Chamonix exhibited suitable habitat for a variety of wildlife species. Some habitat for wading birds, waterfowl, and herpetofauna was observed associated with the natural and manmade ponds, depression marshes, and other wetland communities. Several native plant species characteristic of wetlands were identified in and near these areas. Suitable wild turkey habitat was also present.

The FWC Florida Landscape Assessment Model mean score for the proposal is 7.3 (on a 0–10 increasing value scale). The proposal contains designated FWC Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (SHCAs) for two species of varying conservation priority. This includes 632 acres of Priority 3 SHCA (on a 1-5 scale of decreasing priority) for the swallow-tailed kite (*Elanoides forficatus*) and 698 acres of Priority 5 SHCA for the Florida black bear.

In summary, Chamonix is a very good example of a working lands property that is actively managed with fire in partnership with the non-profit conservation advisors at Tall Timbers, resulting in a lot of high-quality habitat for wildlife. Chamonix would be a very beneficial addition to Florida's conservation lands and is highly recommended as a less than fee acquisition. The reduced impact timber harvest and underplanting approach, combined with the associated rich understory, creates habitat dominated by native plants and supportive of many native wildlife species, including imperiled and at-risk species. The large number and wide variety of tree species, including many mature specimens, contributes to this favorable situation. The property is heavily used by an exceptionally high number of avian species, including some raptors, suggesting prey species such as small mammals are present as well. Wetland habitat adds to the diversity of species the property supports, and conservation of the property would add floodplain and aquifer protection for the area. The strong presence of Tall Timbers in this area of the state and the land management progress already made in partnership with the landowner, suggest the value of this property for conservation will endure.

GOALS, MEASURES AND CRITERIA

GOAL A:

ENHANCE THE COORDINATION AND COMPLETION OF LAND ACQUISITION PROJECTS

Measure A1:

The number of acres acquired through the state's land acquisition programs that contribute to the enhancement of essential natural resources, ecosystem service parcels, and connecting linkage corridors as identified and developed by the best available scientific data.

If acquired, all 961 acres would contribute to ecosystem service parcels and connecting linkage corridors.

Measure A2:

The number of acres protected through the use of alternatives to fee simple acquisition.

The entirety of the project (961 acres) is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition via conservation easement.

GOAL B:

INCREASE THE PROTECTION OF FLORIDA'S BIODIVERSITY AT THE SPECIES, NATURAL COMMUNITY, AND LANDSCAPE LEVELS

Measure B1:

The number of acres acquired of significant Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas.

The SHCA Florida Forever Conservation Needs layer identifies important remaining habitat conservation needs for 62 terrestrial vertebrates on private lands. Priority 1 and 2 represent habitat for species considered imperiled or critically imperiled in Florida. The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation (FFME) table (Appendix B) reports the site contains approximately 724 acres (75% of site) of SHCAs. This is primarily within Priority 3 (75% of site) with the remainder in Priority 5 (10%).

Measure B2:

The number of acres acquired of highest priority conservation areas for Florida's rarest species.

Habitat conservation priorities for 634 of Florida's rarest species were mapped and divided into six priority classes. The FFME reports the proposed project contains approximately 30 acres (3% of site) of rare species habitat, all within Priority 6 areas.

The following table lists the acres of habitat for each species that may be found on the site, based on the FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities. Please note that habitats for these species overlap, so that the sum total of habitat for all species is more than the total acreage of the priority conservation areas. Acreage for aquatic species includes a terrestrial buffer.

Table 2. Rare species habitat based on FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	Acres
<i>Mycteria americana</i>	wood stork	G4	30

See Appendix D for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

Measure B3:

The number of acres acquired of significant landscapes, landscape linkages, and conservation corridors, giving priority to completing linkages.

The FFME reports approximately 906 acres (94%) of the proposed project contribute to protection of ecological greenways, all within Priority 2 areas. Prioritization is based on such factors as importance for wide-ranging species like Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*) and Florida black bear, importance for maintaining a connected reserve network, and riparian corridors.

Measure B4:

The number of acres acquired of under-represented native ecosystems.

The Florida Forever natural community analysis includes only those communities that are under-represented on existing conservation lands. This analysis provides a conservative estimate of the extent of these communities, because it identifies only relatively undisturbed portions of these communities that occur within their historic range. The FFME table lists the acreages of under-represented natural communities found on the site. Based on this analysis, the Chamonix proposal contains 442 acres of restoration upland pine (46% of site), and 17 acres of upland hardwood forest (2%).

Measure B5:

The number of landscape-sized protection areas of at least 50,000 acres that exhibit a mosaic of predominantly intact or restorable natural communities established through new acquisition projects, or augmentations to previous projects.

The Chamonix proposal, although adjacent to Chemonie Plantation Conservation Easement, would not currently contribute to a contiguous landscape-sized protection area of at least 50,000 acres.

Measure B6:

The percentage increase in the number of occurrences of imperiled species on publicly managed conservation areas.

A few rare species (see table below) were observed during the site assessment, all on the proposal's main contiguous tract. Two southern fox squirrels (G5T5, S3, N, N) were seen in the northern portion of the property. A single location of southern lady fern (G5T5, S4, N, T) was documented in the northeastern portion of the property in a historic basin swamp (currently successional hardwood forest). A species of azalea was found as a dominant shrub species in the intact upland hardwood forest in the southwestern portion of the contiguous property. This area should be surveyed in the spring during peak flowering time to make a conclusive identification. These azaleas could potentially be mountain azalea (*Rhododendron canescens*, G5, S4, N, CE) or the Florida flame azalea (*Rhododendron austrinum*, G3, S3, N, E).

While not documented during the site visit, this property is in an area where FWC classifies Florida black bear (G5T4, S4, N, N) as common, and consequently, this species is presumed to occur on the property. Additionally, the application notes several rare species (see table below) among a variety of wildlife that have been observed on this property.

Rarity rankings listed above are in the following order: FNAI global (G, T) and state (S) ranks, federal status, state status.

The FFME table lists the number of Element Occurrences by Global Rank (G-rank) that are found on the proposal. Note that the number of occurrences does not necessarily match the number of species in the following table because a) some species may have more than one occurrence on the proposal site, or b) some species observed on site do not meet the criteria for addition to the FNAI database at this time. The table below contains species falling into any of these observational categories, species gleaned from other sources (e.g., Florida Breeding Bird Atlas) with different degrees of locational precision, and species reported in the application or during the site visit.

Table 3. Rare plants and animals documented or reported to occur within the proposed project

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	State Rank	Federal Status	State Status
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Rare plants documented on site					
<i>Athyrium asplenioides</i>	southern lady fern	G5T5 [‡]	S4	N	T
Additional rare plants reported on site by applicant					
none					
Rare animals documented on site					
<i>Sciurus niger niger</i>	southern fox squirrel	G5T5	S3	N	N
<i>Ursus americanus floridanus</i>	Florida black bear	G5T4	S4	N	N
Additional rare animals reported on site by applicant					
<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>	gopher tortoise	G3	S3	N	ST
<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	little blue heron	G5	S4	N	ST
<i>Eudocimus albus</i>	white ibis	G5	S4	N	N
<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	bald eagle	G5	S3	N	N
<i>Peucaea aestivalis</i>	Bachman's sparrow	G3	S3	N	N

See Appendix D for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

GOAL C:

PROTECT, RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE QUALITY OF NATURAL FUNCTIONS OF LAND, WATER AND WETLAND SYSTEMS OF THE STATE

Measure C1:

The number of acres of publicly-owned land identified as needing restoration; enhancement, and management, acres undergoing restoration or enhancement; acres with restoration activities completed, and acres managed to maintain such restored or enhanced conditions; the number of acres which represent actual or potential imperiled species habitat; the number of acres which are available pursuant to a management plan to restore, enhance, repopulate, and manage imperiled species habitat; and the number of acres of imperiled species habitat managed, restored, and enhanced, repopulated, or acquired.

The property is offered for less-than-fee acquisition, intended to be utilized in a manner consistent with existing uses. The approximately 442 acres of restoration upland pine and 17 acres of upland hardwood forest on Chamonix are mostly in good ecological condition. The restoration upland pine areas could benefit from a shorter interval between prescribed fires to further reduce woody encroachment. The roughly 100 acres of successional hardwood forest would require mechanical treatment to restore the layer to its historical natural composition and structure, as well as reintroduction of a recurrent fire regime.

Invasive plant control needs of the property appear to be relatively minor considering the isolated populations observed during the site visit. Cogon grass should be treated aggressively to halt further increases, as this species can spread rapidly and threaten the integrity of the good quality native groundcover in the restoration upland pine areas on this site. Japanese climbing fern, Chinaberry, and rattlebox appear to be present in low numbers, although the entire site was not assessed. A baseline assessment to determine the full extent of invasive species is warranted if acquisition of an easement occurs.

Measure C4:

The number of acres acquired that protect natural floodplain functions.

The FFME reports approximately 249 acres (26%) of the proposed project may contribute to the protection of natural floodplain function. This area is split between Priority 2 and 3 (each with 13% of site), and the remainder in Priority 4 (< 1%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C5:

The number of acres acquired that protect surface waters of the State.

The FFME reports approximately 872 acres (91%) of the proposed project could provide protection for those surface waters of the State that currently remain in good condition. This area is divided between Priority 5 (50% of site), Priority 4 (41%), and Priority 2 (< 1%). These areas represent acreage that contributes to the protection of state-designated Outstanding Florida Waters, springs, rare fish habitat or other surface waters.

Measure C8:

The number of acres of functional wetland systems protected.

The FFME reports approximately 81 acres (8%) of the proposed project would provide protection for functional wetland systems. This area is divided between Priority 2 (7% of site), and Priority 3 (1%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C11:

The number of acres of public conservation lands in which upland invasive, exotic plants are under maintenance control.

Approximately 945 acres on Chamonix were observed to be under upland invasive and exotic plant control at the time of site reconnaissance.

GOAL D:

ENSURE THAT SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES OF WATER ARE AVAILABLE TO MEET THE CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF NATURAL SYSTEMS AND THE CITIZENS OF THE STATE

Measure D1:

The number of acres acquired which provide retention and storage of surface water in naturally occurring storage areas, such as lakes and wetlands, consistent with the maintenance of water resources or water supplies and consistent with district water supply plans.

All acres of wetland and aquatic habitat provide water storage for the natural resources of the area. Based upon the 2022 Florida Land Use Cover and Forms Classification System land use data delineated by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), nearly 82 acres or approximately 8.6% of the total site is comprised of wetlands which may provide surface water storage and/or flood attenuation. Wetland types reported on the property include Wetland Hardwood Forests and Wetland Forested Mixed. In addition, another 91.5 acres (9.6%) of the property are listed as water (i.e. lakes and reservoirs) which provide additional storage.

The vast majority of the property (60% or 575.6 acres) is comprised of upland forest and another 163 acres or 17% of the parcel is in either agriculture or rangeland uses. The hydrogeology in the area is characterized by a strong hydraulic connection between surface water and groundwater, high aquifer recharge, and as a result high groundwater availability. Due to the sandy soils present in the upland portions of the property, considerable additional storage of water is likely to occur sub-surface within the surficial and upper Floridan aquifers. Preservation of these lands will serve to help replenish the local aquifers. The subsurface storage can contribute directly to flows at the St. Marks River Rise, a first magnitude spring in Leon County, and baseflows for the St. Marks River. This is consistent with and supports the Northwest Florida Water Management District's 2019 Minimum Flow for the St. Marks River Rise.

Measure D2:

The quantity of water made available through the water resource development component of a district water supply plan for which a water management district is responsible.

There is currently no water supply plan associated with the region this parcel. This parcel is located within the Northwest Florida Water Management District's Region VII which includes Jefferson, Leon and Wakulla counties. Water use in this area is primarily groundwater from the Floridan aquifer, which accounts for approximately 98% of water use in the region. In 2020, approximately 47.9 million gallons per day of water was consumed, nearly 83% of which was in Leon County. Preserving this property will help protect the recharge of the Floridan aquifer which is the primary water source for the area.

Measure D3:

The number of acres acquired of groundwater recharge areas critical to springs, sinks, aquifers, other natural systems, or water supply.

The sandy surface sediments found throughout the site promote groundwater recharge to the local aquifers contributing flows and water quality to the St. Marks River Rise and St. Marks River. The entire project proposed for acquisition is located within the St. Marks River Rise groundwater contribution area. In addition, the property is mostly undeveloped and as such promotes extensive recharge.

The FFME reports approximately 959 acres (100%) of the proposed project would provide protection for groundwater recharge areas. This area is divided between Priority 5 (51% of site), Priority 3 (37%), Priority 4 (10%), and Priority 2 (2%). Prioritization is based on features that contribute to aquifer vulnerability such as swallets, thickness of the intermediate aquifer confining unit and closed topographical depressions, as well as areas within springshed protection zones and in proximity to public water supply wells.

Table 4. Spatial Analysis for Potential Water Quality Benefits of Chamonix

Categories	Scoring Criteria	Project Score
FDEP High Profile Springs (In 1,2,3 or > spring sheds)	12, 24, 36	
FDEP Select Agricultural Land Use (0-30%, >30-65%, >65%)	4,8,12	4
FDEP Florida Aquifer Vulnerability (FAVA)	4,7,10	7
FDEP Special Nutrient Impaired WBIDs	9	
FDEP Distance to Major Lakes (100, 500, 1000 meters)	8,7,6	8
FDEP Springsheds or within 5 miles	10, 7	10
FDEP BMAPs	10	10
FDEP Distance to Major Rivers (100, 500, 1000 meters)	6,5,4	

Total Possible	101	39
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GIS Evaluation score is converted to a 1 to 5 value (low to high)

FINAL DEAR SCORE = 3, medium water quality protection benefits

GOAL E:

INCREASE NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED PUBLIC RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Measure E2:

The miles of trails that are available for public recreation, giving priority to those that provide significant connections including those that will assist in completing the Florida National Scenic Trail.

The FFME reports that 0.6 miles of the land trail priorities and opportunities identified by the Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan (2023 update) come within a quarter mile of the proposal.

GOAL F:

PRESERVE SIGNIFICANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL OR HISTORIC SITES

Measure F1:

The increase in the number of and percentage of historic and archaeological properties listed in the Florida Master Site File or National Register of Historic Places which are protected or preserved for public use.

The Chamonix Florida Forever proposal contains one historical cemetery listed in the Florida Master Site File.

Measure F2:

The increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in state ownership.

Acquisition of the Chamonix Florida Forever Project would not meet Measure F2, as it would not result in an increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in *state ownership*.

CULTURAL RESOURCES:

According to the Division of Historical Resource's (DHR) Florida Master Site File, there is one recorded cultural resource within the boundary of the Chamonix Florida Forever Project. The Peck Cemetery (LE01898) is a recorded historic cemetery with interments dating back to at least 1900. Containing greater than 60 known graves, the Peck Cemetery, although named for the former community of Peck, today appears to be more closely associated with the nearby St. Stephen Missionary Baptist Church, which actively uses the site.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS:

DHR's staff observed the recorded cemetery (LE01898) in fair shape and noted that St. Stephen Missionary Baptist Church appears to be actively utilizing the site for ongoing interments. No cultural resources were observed on the primary Chamonix tract itself. However, the property has not been formally subject to an intensive archaeological survey and the potential for unrecorded resources is high. Land use records indicate an extensive nineteenth-century use of the property, and its environmental/topographic features are analog to regional locales with a high number of archaeological resources. Should any artifacts or other cultural resources be discovered in the future, DHR recommends leaving them in place and contacting DHR's Public Lands Archaeology Program for further evaluation.

GOAL G:

INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF FORESTLAND AVAILABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE
MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Measure G1:

The number of acres acquired that are available for sustainable forest management.

The FFME reports approximately 545 acres (57% of site) could be available for sustainable forest management, mostly divided between Priority 2 (209 acres), Priority 1 (188 acres), and Priority 3 (145 acres). Prioritization is based on 8 criteria set by the Florida Forest Service: whether trees are natural or planted, size of tract, distance to market, average total height that dominant and codominant pine trees obtain, access/operability, burn frequency, years since last burn, and landscape integrity.

Measure G2:

The number of acres of state-owned forestland managed for economic return in accordance with current best management practices.

This site is slated for less-than-fee purchase. The current landowner is managing approximately 613 acres for economic return and was observed at the time of site visit to be following best management practices.

Measure G4:

The percentage and number of acres identified for restoration restored by reforestation.

Observed were approximately 91 acres or approximately 9.5% (amounts do not include the current cattle/improved pasture or building/low intensity urban areas) of Chamonix have been identified as requiring reforestation for restoration.

GOAL I:

MITIGATE THE EFFECTS OF NATURAL DISASTERS AND FLOODS IN DEVELOPED
AREAS

Measure I1:

The number of acres acquired within a 100-year floodplain or a coastal high hazard area.

According to the application, approximately 156 acres of the proposal are within a 100-year floodplain.

CRITERIA

The proposed project meets the following Florida Forever criteria (§ 259.105, F.S.)

- (9)
 - (a) The project meets multiple goals described in subsection (4).
 - (b) The project is part of an ongoing governmental effort to restore, protect, or develop land areas or water resources.
 - (d) The project has significant archaeological or historic value.
 - (f) The project contributes to the solution of water resource problems on a regional basis.
 - (k) The project may be acquired, in whole or in part, using alternatives to fee simple, including but not limited to, tax incentives, mitigation funds, or other revenues, the purchase of development rights, hunting rights, agricultural or silvicultural rights, or mineral rights or obtaining conservation easements or flowage easements.
- (10) The Acquisition and Restoration Council shall give increased priority to:

- (c) projects that can be acquired in less than fee ownership, such as a permanent conservation easement;
- (d) projects that contribute to improving the quality and quantity of surface water and groundwater;
- (e) projects that contribute to improving the water quality and flow of springs
- (f) projects for which the state's land conservation plans overlap with the military's need to protect lands, water, and habitat to ensure the sustainability of military missions
- (h) projects located within the Florida Wildlife Corridor as defined in s. 259.1055(4)

MANAGEMENT

If acquired as a perpetual conservation easement, the primary management responsibility would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management would occur to confirm continued compliance with the conditions of the easement. Monitoring would be coordinated by the Office of Environmental Services within the FDEP's Division of State Lands.

FUNDING SOURCES

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

FUNDING FOR MAPPING, APPRAISAL, NEGOTIATIONS & CLOSING

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

OWNERSHIP PATTERN AND ACQUISITION PLANNING

Title and Legal Access Issues, Jurisdictional and Sovereignty Lands, Legal Issues

Record of title, a designation of jurisdictional and sovereignty lands and any other legal issues will be determined at the time of acquisition and are not known at this time.

Known Encumbrances (easement, long-term leases, restrictive covenants, etc.)

The easements and encumbrances of record would be determined during the appraisal mapping. A current title commitment would be obtained, or the owner's title insurance policy would be depicted or noted on the appraisal map.

Description and location of hazardous waste sites, dumps, borrow pits

There are no apparent contamination sites within the project based on the application form.

Estimated Cost of Appraisal and Mapping

FDEP Bureau of Appraisal estimates \$10,000 to \$20,000 in appraisal fees.

Acquisition Phases

Subject to funding, the Chamonix Florida Forever project will be phased based upon price.

GOVERNMENT PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT**Contribution to Recreation and Open Space Needs**

Acquisition would link existing conservation land that provides buffer area and filtration in the floodplain, just 3 miles east of the Urban Service Boundary. While the parcel is privately managed and not available for public recreation, the public can view approximately 2 miles of scenic and rural working lands along the major artery of Miccosukee Road.

Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Spaces

Low Potential: Given the overall potential for subdivision, conversion, and/or development, the property would be at a low risk of losing significant upland pine and mixed hardwood pine forests. These forests provide habitat for several Species of Greatest Conservation Need listed under the Florida State Wildlife Action Plan. Historically, the region surrounding the subject property was longleaf-pine wiregrass savannah; less than 3% of this natural community's original area remains due to increasing development, habitat fragmentation, and conversion into agricultural land. However, the subject property's land management practices have supported naturally occurring recruitment of this historical habitat. Development would likely result in further destabilization of longleaf pine wiregrass savannah, upland and wetland and degradation of water quality and natural storm-buffering functions.

Potential for Being Subdivided

Low Potential: The potential for subdivision or conversion to other uses is low. The site and surrounding land are located outside of the Urban Service Area and have a Rural land use designation and Rural zoning code. However, future growth could pressure the County to Expand the Urban Service Area into include the subject property, which would then allow for higher density development.

Zoning and Densities within the Project Boundaries

The zoning category for the subject property is Rural, which falls under Section 10-6.612 in the County's Code of Ordinances. This code has the same intent as the Rural land use designation and only permits development for agriculture, silviculture, ecotourism, very low density residential, some community and passive recreation facilities, and some active recreation as a restricted use. The code outlines design and development standards for non-residential development and restricted uses to prevent encroachment and fragmentation of agricultural uses and to ensure compatibility with adjacent uses.

Existing Land Uses and Future Land Use Designations

Existing Land Uses: The existing land uses are primarily agricultural. There is a total of seven residences on the subject property, including six single family homes and one mobile home. 83% of the subject property is upland habitat, with 51% being upland pine forest, an underrepresented natural community according to the Florida Natural Area Inventory. The FNAI finds the uplands on the property to have high ratings for forest sustainability and aquifer recharge. Over 90% of the uplands have well-drained soils that contribute to a high recharge rate (15-20 inches per year) of the Florida aquifer, which serves over ten million people. The subject property is in the Upper Wakulla River & Wakulla Spring Basin Management Action Plan, which identifies permanent protection of land in known spring sheds as the best way to improve and restore water quality, which has been declining in recent decades. 16% of the subject property is wetlands, including natural lakes, impoundments, forested wetlands, and creek drainages. No active commercial uses or intensive recreational development currently occurs on the property.

Future Land Use Designation: The FLUM category for the subject site is Rural. Pursuant to Policy 2.8.4 of the County Comprehensive Plan, the intent of the Rural land use category is to maintain and promote agriculture, silviculture, and natural resource-based activities and to preserve natural system and ecological functions. As such, maximum development intensities and densities are restricted to maintain pastoral development patterns, and any non-residential activities, active recreation, community services, and light infrastructure, are prohibited unless found to be in support of agricultural or natural resource-based activities. The maximum permitted residential density in the Rural FLUM category is one dwelling unit per 10 acres. This comes out to a maximum development potential of 9 dwelling units.

Development Potential

Low Potential: The development potential of the property is low. Under current zoning category, development for non-residential uses unrelated to natural resource-based activities are prohibited. The application claims that there are no current potential threats or development plans.

Transportation Planning Issues

The proposed project is located in the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District 3 in Leon County. A majority of the roadways near this project are located within rural areas dominated by natural habitats. U.S. Highway 90/State Road (SR) 10 touches a small portion of the southernmost tip of the project site, while the road itself runs east and west, south of the project site for approximately for a 2-mile stretch. SR 59 runs north to south less than 4 miles east but stops once intersecting with SR 10. These two roads, along with north to south State Highway 59, located 1.5 miles east, are designated evacuation routes.

The entire project parcel is surrounded by the Florida Wildlife Corridor. Currently, a Project Development and Environmental Study is underway for a trail project, directly adjacent to this project site. The proposed trail does have a right of way need, but it is currently proposed on the south side of U.S. Highway 90/SR 10 outside the limits of the proposed land. FDOT does not anticipate an impact to the proposed property.

While FDOT finds no adverse impacts to the proposed project at this time, coordination with FDOT District 3 staff during the acquisition process is recommended to address any transportation system issues that may arise in the future and incorporate them into the management plan as appropriate.

Ongoing Governmental Efforts

In 2019, the Northwest Florida Water Management District established a minimum flow for the St. Marks River Rise. This minimum flow is to ensure that future withdrawals will not cause significant harm to the spring. Protection of this parcel will help ensure that flows at the St. Marks River Rise are protected through aquifer recharge.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Staff in FDEP's Division of State Lands and FNAI determined the final project recommendations. Diana Pepe, Paige Kraker and Katie Ramirez in the Division of State Land's Office of Environmental Services were responsible for the overall coordination of this report, with contributions from the following:

- Division of Historical Resources: Brandon Ackermann

Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Chamonix PER

- Florida Forest Service: Cat Ingram and Caitlyn Peca
- Florida Natural Areas Inventory: Gwen Iacona and Allie Heiker
- Department of Commerce: Yazmin Valdez and David Pullin
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: Dean Cox, Joss Kim, and Briana Bjordahl
- FDEP Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration: Moira Homann and Kenneth Weaver
- Florida Department of Transportation: Emily Rhodes
- Northwest Florida Water Management District: Paul Thurman

APPENDICES**Appendix A:**

Final FF measures table: Report requirement 259.105 (15)d, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

Chamonix: Florida Forever Measures Evaluation 20260725

GIS ACRES = 960

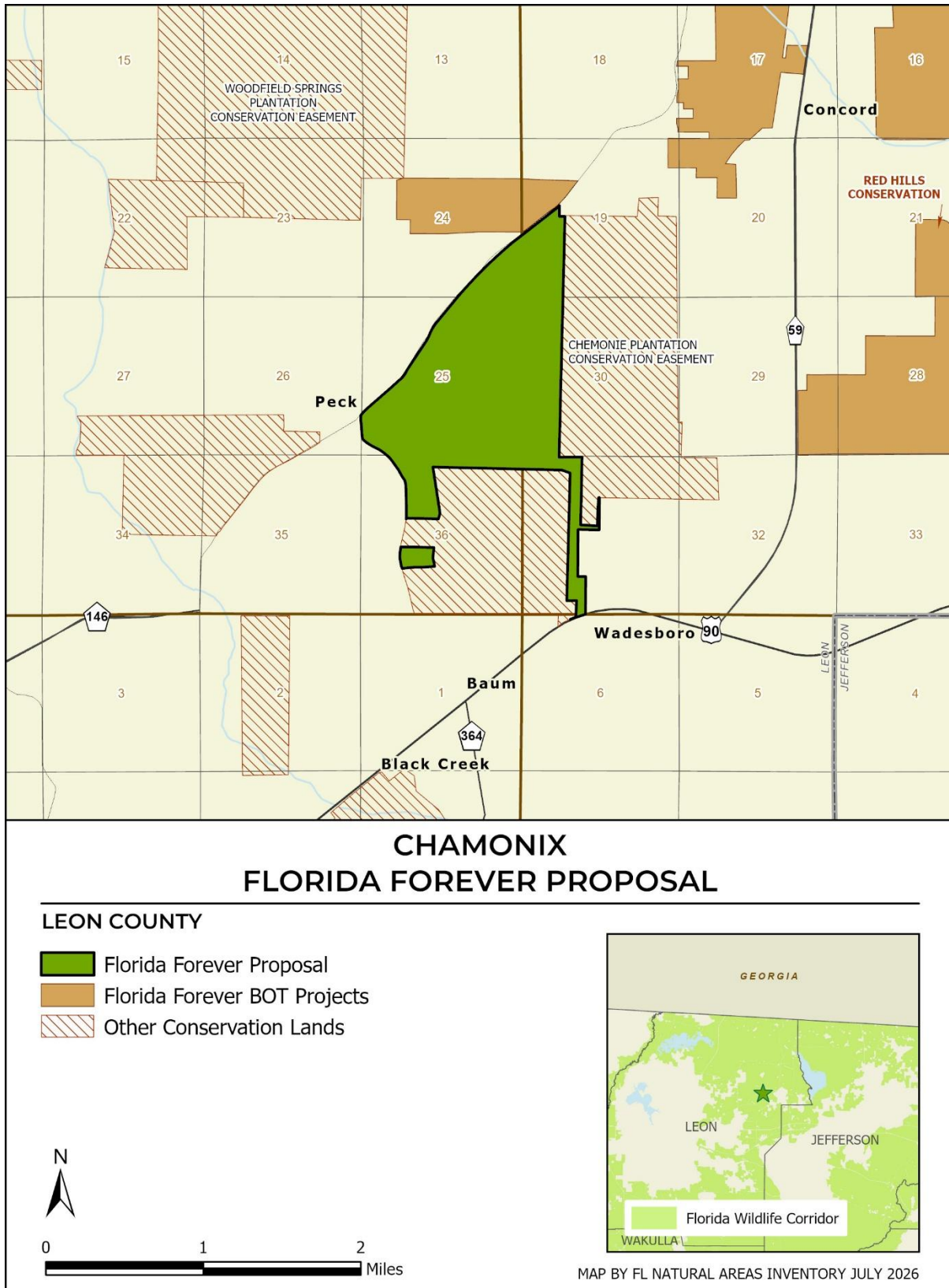
MEASURES	Resource Acres ²	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	632	66%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	92	10%
Total Acres	724	75%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	30	3%
Total Acres	30	3%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	906	94%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	0	0%
Total Acres	906	94%
B4: Under-represented Natural Communities		
Upland Glade (G1)	0	0%
Pine Rockland (G1)	0	0%
Scrub and Scrubby Flatwoods (G2)	0	0%
Rockland Hammock (G2)	0	0%
Dry Prairie (G2)	0	0%
Seepage Slope (G2)	0	0%
Sandhill (G3)	0	0%
Sandhill Upland Lake (G3)	0	0%
Upland Pine (G3)	442	46%
Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4)	0	0%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	17	2%
Total Acres	459	48%
B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species		
G1	0	
G2	0	
G3	0	
G4	1	
G5	1	
Total	2	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	122	13%
Priority 3	121	13%
Priority 4	6	< 1%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	249	26%

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres ²	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	2	< 1%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	393	41%
Priority 5	476	50%
Priority 6	0	0%
Priority 7	0	0%
Total Acres	872	91%
C7: Fragile Coastal Resources		
Fragile Coastal Uplands	0	0%
Imperiled Coastal Lakes	0	0%
Coastal Wetlands	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
C8: Functional Wetlands		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	69	7%
Priority 3	11	1%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	81	8%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	24	2%
Priority 3	352	37%
Priority 4	97	10%
Priority 5	487	51%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	959	100%
E2: Recreational Trails (miles)		
(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)		
Land Trail Priorities	0.6	
Land Trail Opportunities	0.0	
Total Miles	0.6	
F2: Arch. & Historical Sites (number)		
	0 sites	
G1: Sustainable Forestry		
Priority 1	188	20%
Priority 2	209	22%
Priority 3	145	15%
Priority 4	2	< 1%
Priority 5	1	< 1%
Total Acres	545	57%
G3: Forestland for Recharge		
	209	22%

*Acres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted. This analysis converts site boundary into pixels, which causes slight differences from GIS acres; this effect is most noticeable on small sites.

Appendix B:

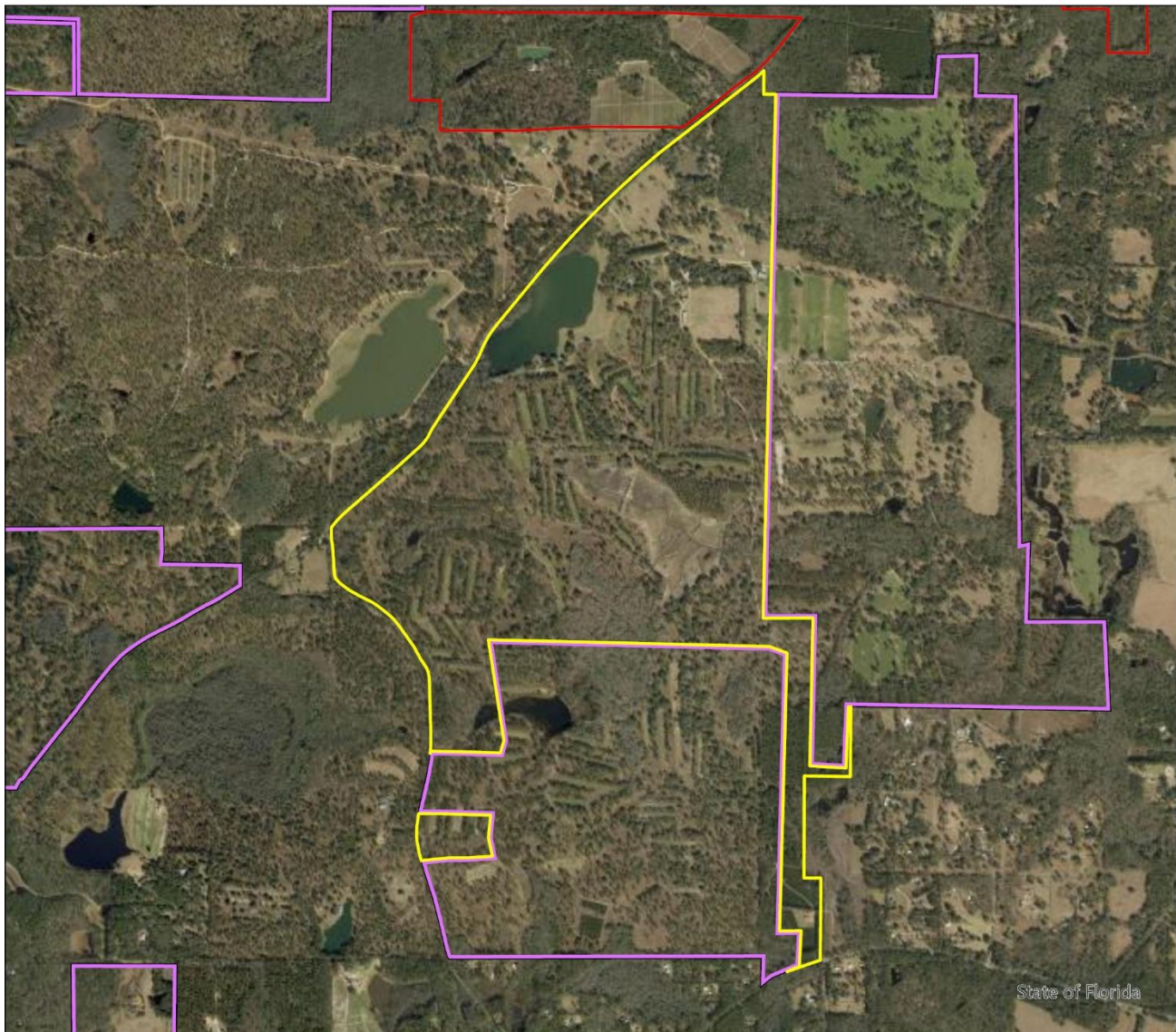
Final FF proposal boundary maps: Report requirement 259.105 (15)k, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

B1: Florida Forever map

B2: Aerial map

CHAMONIX FLORIDA FOREVER PROPOSAL

FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSAL BOUNDARY AS OF AUGUST 2026



Map Produced by: FL Natural Areas Inventory, N. Pasco, August 2026

Background: ESRI World Imagery



- Florida Forever Proposal Boundary
- Florida Forever BOT Projects
- Existing Private Conservation Lands



Appendix C:**PROPERTY ID #'S FOR FINAL RECOMMENDED BOUNDARY**

County	Parcel ID	Owner	Acres	Just (Market) Value	Parcel Designation
Leon	1524204020000 (Partial)	Chamonix Plantation LLC	476.63	\$2,655,354	Essential
Leon	1524204030000	Chamonix Plantation LLC	12.04	\$1,418,121	Essential
Leon	1525200010000	Chamonix Plantation LLC	51.93	\$778,712	Essential
Leon	1525204010000 (Partial)	Chamonix Plantation LLC	315.75	\$1,366,481	Essential
Leon	1525208510000	Chamonix Plantation LLC	1.01	\$26,000	Essential
Leon	1536200010000 (Partial)	Chamonix Plantation LLC	63.34	\$229,036	Essential
Leon	1631204050000 (Partial)	Chamonix Plantation LLC	10.61	\$64,869	Essential
Leon	1631204070000 (Partial)	Chamonix Plantation LLC	30.02	\$216,912	Essential
		TOTAL	961.32	\$6,755,486	

Appendix D:*Imperiled Species FNAI Ranking Definitions***FNAI GLOBAL ELEMENT RANK**

G1 = Critically imperiled globally because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.

G2 = Imperiled globally because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.

G3 = Either very rare and local throughout its range (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.

G4 = Apparently secure globally (may be rare in parts of range).

G5 = Demonstrably secure globally.

GH = Of historical occurrence throughout its range, may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).

GX = Believed to be extinct throughout range.

GXC = Extirpated from the wild but still known from captivity or cultivation.

G#? = Tentative rank (e.g., G2?).

G#G# = Range of rank; insufficient data to assign specific global rank (e.g., G2G3).

G#T# = Rank of a taxonomic subgroup such as a subspecies or variety; the G portion of the rank refers to the entire species and the T portion refers to the specific subgroup; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G3T1).

G#Q = Rank of questionable species - ranked as species but questionable whether it is species or subspecies; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G2Q).

G#T#Q = Same as above, but validity as subspecies or variety is questioned.

GU = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned (e.g., GUT2).

GNA = Ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).

GNR = Element not yet ranked (temporary).

GNRTNR = Neither the element nor the taxonomic subgroup has yet been ranked.

FNAI STATE ELEMENT RANK

S1 = Critically imperiled in Florida because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.

S2 = Imperiled in Florida because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.

S3 = Either very rare and local in Florida (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.

S4 = Apparently secure in Florida (may be rare in parts of range).

S5 = Demonstrably secure in Florida.

SH = Of historical occurrence in Florida, possibly extirpated, but may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).

SX = Believed to be extirpated throughout Florida.

SU = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned.

SNA = State ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).

SNR = Element not yet ranked (temporary).

Appendix E:
Site Visit Photos



Basin swamp



Field with some planted pine



Cattle in pasture



Cody Pond



Bottomland forest



Barn and horses in pasture

Florida Forever Project Evaluation Report

Levys Prairie Putnam County



Acquisition Type: Less-Than-Fee

Acres: 2,272

Just Value: \$7,998,632

Application Date: April 15, 2026

Project Sponsors: Putnam Land Conservancy

Prepared By:

Division of State Lands

Office of Environmental Services



Submitted to the Acquisition and Restoration Council
October 9, 2026

Executive Summary

The Levys Prairie Florida Forever proposal contains 22 parcels owned by six owners, totaling approximately 2,272 acres in Putnam County. The property is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition with a tax assessed value of \$7,998,632.

The proposal consists of three disjunct tracts situated approximately 0.4 miles from each other. The eastern tract borders a large basin marsh, Levys Prairie, from which the project gets its name. The western tract lies adjacent to Alachua Conservation Trust's Little Orange Creek Preserve and contains the western half of Fowlers Lake, a sandhill upland lake.

The property is currently used for silviculture, cattle, and recreational hunting. Additionally, the western tract has an 11,000 square-foot wedding venue. Most of the proposal is made up of pine plantations that are not bedded and consist mainly of slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*). The owner of the northern portion of the eastern tract utilizes prescribed fire to benefit populations of game species for recreational hunting.

The proposal supports a diverse array of natural communities, the most common being bottomland forest, which surrounds small seepage streams. During the site visit, one seepage stream was flowing and is said to be perennial, but most of the seepage streams are intermittent. Upland hardwood forests are located along the edge of the bottomland forests. Basin marshes are also located throughout the property. The marshes found in the northeast corner of the proposal are what remain from the conversion to pasture in the area decades ago. The property also contains a small amount of sandhill with additional remnant sandhill in the pine plantation.

The State Threatened Florida sandhill crane (*Antigone canadensis pratensis*) and the State Endangered sand butterfly pea (*Centrosema arenicola*) were observed on site, as well as pocket gopher (*Geomys pinetis*) mounds and an active gopher tortoise burrow (*Gopherus polyphemus*). The sand butterfly pea was found in a fire-excluded sandhill area that is now successional hardwood forest. Within a bottomland forest, there was a large, possible champion, sweet gum tree (*Liquidambar styraciflua*). Additionally, the owners reported observing Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*) on the property. The proposal is within the Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor, a 100 mile long, 1.6-million-acre landscape which aims to connect conservation lands from the Ocala National Forest to the Osceola National Forest. This corridor protects habitat for several rare and imperiled species, including the Florida black bear and gopher tortoise.

Several historic sites can be found within the Levys Prairie proposal. These include a historic homesite dating back to the late nineteenth century. This site includes a Cracker house in fair condition, as well as syrup kettles, a stone well, and privy holes.

If approved for addition to the 2027 Florida Forever Priority List, the proposal should be considered as an addition to the Little Orange Creek Corridor project in the Partnerships and Regional Incentives category. All ±2,272 acres proposed for acquisition are considered essential due to the resources documented on the property (see Appendix C). An interagency team conducted a site visit on July 8, 2026. Information included in this report is a result of this site visit.

PURPOSE FOR ACQUISITION

If acquired, the Levys Prairie proposal will contribute to the surface water and floodplain protection of Levys Prairie, as well as Fowlers Lake. The project will increase the amount of forestland available for natural resource management and protect habitat for rare and imperiled species, including the Florida black bear, Florida sandhill crane and gopher tortoise.

Acquisition of this project would meet the following Florida Forever Goals, Criteria and Priorities:

Goal	Criteria		Priority	
A ☒	(a) ☒	(h) ☐	(a) ☐	(h) ☐
B ☒	(b) ☒	(i) ☐	(b) ☐	
C ☒	(c) ☒	(j) ☐	(c) ☒	
D ☒	(d) ☒	(k) ☒	(d) ☒	
E ☐	(e) ☐	(l) ☐	(e) ☒	
F ☐	(f) ☒		(f) ☐	
G ☒	(g) ☐		(g) ☐	
H ☐				
I ☐				

*Projects proposed to be funded pursuant to Section 259.105(3)(b), F.S., must meet at least one of the criteria outlined under Section 259.105(9), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0021, F.A.C., and shall meet at least two of the Florida Forever goals and measures outlined in Section 259.105(4), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0022, F.A.C.

LOCATION AND PROXIMITY TO OTHER MANAGED AREAS

The Levys Prairie proposal includes ca. 2,271.8 acres in Putnam County. It consists of one large eastern tract (with 2 small satellite tracts under the same ownership) and an additional tract about 0.4 miles west of the southern half of the eastern tract. The property is proposed for less-than-fee protection via conservation easement.

The proposal is situated in western Putnam County, roughly 3 miles northeast of Hawthorne and 4 miles south of Melrose. The south end of the eastern tract has 0.1 mile of frontage on State Road 20, and State Road 21 is adjacent to or crosses through the eastern tract for about 1.4 miles. The ca. 231-acre western tract is adjacent to the Little Orange Creek Preserve (Alachua County), the only existing conservation land that adjoins the proposal. The Ordway Swisher Biological Station (University of Florida) is 0.7 miles north of the proposal. Levy Prairie/Levy Lake, abutting much of the proposal's eastern boundary, is submerged lands. Although the proposal is not part of a corridor of existing conservation lands, there are many small and disjunct preserves and conservation areas within 10 miles; also within 10 miles is a

large block of land including the Georgia-Pacific Lochloosa Conservation Easement and other lands connecting to Paynes Prairie to the west, and Ocala National Forest and contiguous lands to the southeast. The nearest unacquired Florida Forever lands are the Little Orange Creek Corridor (1 mile south and connected via Orange Creek Preserve), the Lake Santa Fe project (5 miles northwest), Etoniah/Cross Florida Greenway (4 miles southeast), and Star Lake Connector (4 miles south).

RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

Florida Natural Areas Inventory

This evaluation is based on onsite observations, as well as information gathered from the proposal, aerial photography, US Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5' topographic maps, Cooperative Land Cover data (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission [FWC] and Florida Natural Areas Inventory [FNAI], Florida Cooperative Land Cover Map, version 4.0), the FNAI Natural Heritage database, and other public GIS data. A field survey was conducted on July 8, 2026, by the Acquisition and Restoration Council liaison staff, including FNAI biologists Geoff Parks and Kim Alexander.

The Levys Prairie proposal is situated within the Hawthorne Lakes Geomorphological Province, where dissolution of the underlying Ocala Limestone has formed many sinkholes, karst lakes, and basin marshes or "prairies". The ca. 2,040-acre eastern tracts vary in elevation from about 95 to 180 feet, with the lowest elevations along the eastern edge where it contains a portion of Levys Prairie. Higher elevations on this tract have sandy, well-drained soils, occasionally punctuated by lower forested areas in the northern part of the tract, and by forests and small sandhill upland lakes to the south. In a few places, groundwater seeps out of the east-facing slopes on the eastern tract, forming small, short streams that drain to Levys Prairie.

The smaller western tract contains wetlands bordering Fowlers Prairie on its southwest edge, and its eastern edge contains the western half of Fowlers Lake, a sandhill upland lake. There is no well-defined surface water drainage on the western tract.

Overall, only about 17% of the site consists of relatively unaltered natural communities, and these are in varying condition. The most common natural community onsite (by acreage) is bottomland forest, which is found in several low areas on the eastern tract, often surrounding small seepage streams. These areas have a canopy of swamp tupelo (*Nyssa biflora*), sweetgum, sweetbay (*Magnolia virginiana* var. *australis*) and water oak (*Quercus nigra*). Smaller trees and shrubs include American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana* var. *caroliniana*), common buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*) and swamp bay (*Tamala palustris*). Herbaceous plants are diverse and vary from sparse to dense, with species such as jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*), sedge (*Carex* sp.), spadeleaf (*Centella erecta*), witchgrass (*Dichanthelium* sp.), netted chain fern (*Lorinseria areolata*), partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*), royal fern (*Osmunda spectabilis*), Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) and millet beaksedge (*Rhynchospora miliacea*). Large woody vines are occasional, including trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*) and muscadine (*Muscadinia rotundifolia* var. *rotundifolia*).

There are a handful of seepage streams on the proposal, but their acreage has not been estimated, due to their small footprint. Some of these are intermittent, but one was flowing at the time of the site visit and is said to be perennial. This sand-bottomed stream emerges as a seep from a deeply incised clay bank where it has formed a steephead; here, seepage from

the lower part of the slope undermines the slope above, causing a ravine that grows longer over time. These ravines provide cool and humid microclimates that can sometimes provide habitat for a variety of rare and uncommon species. Downstream, from its emergence, the stream spreads out and disappears within the basin. There is no aquatic vegetation. In most cases, the riparian zone is not distinguishable from the surrounding bottomland forest, although one stream is surrounded by a narrow band of floodplain swamp that was too small to be mapped. This area has large swamp tupelo and sweetbay and smaller bald cypress, and shrubs including common buttonbush, fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*), and hairy highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium fuscatum*).

Upland hardwood forests (about 3% of the site) often grow as a fringe around the edges of bottomland forests. The canopy contains frequent pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*), as well as sweetgum, Southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), slash pine, loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*), laurel oak (*Quercus hemisphaerica*), water oak, live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) and cabbage palm. Smaller trees and shrubs include saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), smallflower pawpaw (*Asimina parviflora*), wild olive (*Cartrema americanum*), mockernut hickory (*Carya tomentosa*), coastalplain staggerbush (*Lyonia fruticosa*), swamp bay, sparkleberry (*Vaccinium arboreum*) and deerberry (*Vaccinium stamineum*). Groundcover species include sedges, variable witchgrass (*Dichanthelium commutatum*) and other witchgrass species, tall elephantsfoot (*Elephantopus elatus*), coralbean (*Erythrina herbacea*), partridgeberry, resurrection fern (*Pleopeltis michauxiana*) and tailed bracken (*Pteridium pseudocaudatum*). Climbing vines (muscadine and saw greenbrier [*Smilax bona-nox*]) are occasional, and sarsaparilla vine (*Smilax pumila*) creeps on the forest floor. Bartram's air-plant (*Tillandsia bartramii*) is common as an epiphyte.

About 3% of the proposal is made up of basin marshes, which are in poor to good condition. Much of Levys Prairie — itself a basin marsh — is submerged sovereign land, so the prairie makes up only a small proportion of the basin marsh acreage on the proposal. About 140 acres in the northeast corner of the proposal is within the footprint of Levys Prairie, but much of this area was ditched and converted to pasture decades ago, and only the deepest depressions remain as marsh. These prairie-associated basin marshes mostly consist of a dense layer of bluestem (*Andropogon* sp.), maidencane (*Hymenachne hemitoma*) and dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*). Red maple (*Acer rubrum*), common buttonbush and groundsel tree (*Baccharis halimifolia*) are fairly common, but generally short and mixed in with grasses and herbs. One marsh is more heavily grazed and sparsely vegetated; this is dominated by soft rush (*Juncus effusus* ssp. *solutus*) with bare, disturbed soil areas resulting from hog damage. There is also a small basin marsh in the interior of a forested area on the eastern tract. This wetland has an herbaceous layer consisting of Virginia chain fern (*Anchistea virginica*) and smooth beggarticks (*Bidens laevis*), with a well-developed shrub layer of fetterbush and sweetbay.

There are a few areas of basin swamp on the proposal. One of two small basin swamp areas near Fowlers Prairie was seen during the site visit; this consists mainly of pond cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*) draped with Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*). Two larger areas on the eastern tract appear to be cypress-dominated, but these were not visited.

There is one area of wet flatwoods on the eastern tract near Levys Prairie. It is in fair condition, with more shrubs and less herbs than would be present if it had been burned regularly. The canopy is dominated by large loblolly pine, also suggesting a history of disturbance. This woodland is relatively open, with little if any subcanopy. Tall shrubs and small trees are

common, however, and include large gallberry (*Ilex coriacea*), Virginia willow (*Itea virginica*), rusty staggerbush (*Lyonia ferruginea*) and a few swamp bay. Smaller shrubs are uncommon but consist of dwarf dangleberry (*Gaylussacia nana*) and Darrow's blueberry (*Vaccinium darrowii*). There is little groundcover.

Adjacent to Fowlers Prairie along the west edge of the western tract is a large area of baygall in fair condition. Most of this forest is young and successional, possibly a result of past logging of cypress out of what may historically have been a basin swamp. The canopy of this swamp consists of loblolly bay (*Gordonia lasianthus*), with other species including Southern magnolia, sweetbay, slash pine, loblolly pine and water oak. Smaller trees and shrubs are dense, including young loblolly bay, as well as swamp doghobble (*Eubotrys racemosus*), dahoon (*Ilex cassine*), Virginia willow, rusty staggerbush, fetterbush, southern bayberry (*Morella cerifera*), saw palmetto, swamp bay and hairy highbush blueberry. Laurel greenbrier (*Smilax laurifolia*) grows abundantly through the shrubs. The groundcover is mainly Virginia chain fern. Sphagnum moss (*Sphagnum* sp.) grows in low spots on the forest floor, and iris (*Iris* sp.) was observed at the forest edge.

One upland area on the eastern tract appears to be mesic hammock. This area was not inspected in detail but is dominated by large live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) and cabbage palm. There is a small sandhill on the property, which is relatively diverse and intact, although insufficient fire has allowed the proliferation of sand pine (*Pinus clausa*) and the development of an abnormally dense subcanopy and shrub layer. This area has a canopy of longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) and some sand pine and a midstory of sand pine, sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*), laurel oak, turkey oak (*Quercus laevis*) and sand post oak (*Quercus margaretiae*). Patches of saw palmetto, scattered sparkleberry, deerberry, Florida rosemary (*Ceratiola ericoides*) and small oaks make up a moderately dense shrub layer. Earleaf greenbrier (*Smilax auriculata*) vines are occasional. Herbs and small shrubs are common, including bluestem, southern wiregrass (*Aristida beyrichiana*) and other threeawn (*Aristida*) species, Florida alicia (*Chapmannia floridana*), whitemouth dayflower (*Commelina erecta* var. *angustifolia*), rabbitbells (*Crotalaria rotundifolia*), needleleaf witchgrass (*Dichanthelium aciculare*), dogtongue wild buckwheat (*Eriogonum tomentosum*), gopher apple (*Geobalanus oblongifolius*), coastalplain chaffhead (*Carphephorus corymbosus*), silkgrass (*Pityopsis* sp.), blackroot (*Pterocaulon pycnostachyum*), snoutbean (*Rhynchosia* sp.), queen's delight (*Stillingia sylvatica*), coastalplain dawnflower (*Stylisma patens*) and wavyleaf noseburn (*Tragia urens*). Fowlers Lake on the western tract, and a handful of small ponds on the southern part of the eastern tract, are sandhill upland lakes. These lie in relatively deep basins caused by the collapse of the subsurface limestone. Water levels in these communities fluctuate widely, exposing or submerging varying amounts of the basin. The sandy soils on the upper slopes are sparsely vegetated with threeawn, Florida rosemary, Michaux's croton (*Croton michauxii*), witchgrass and nailwort (*Paronychia* sp.). There is an herbaceous fringe made up of plants such as dogfennel, marshpennywort (*Hydrocotyle* sp.), maidencane, orangegrass (*Hypericum gentianoides*), meadowbeauty (*Rhexia* sp.) and spreading beaksedge (*Rhynchospora divergens*) at the lake edge that extends into shallow water. White waterlily (*Nymphaea odorata* ssp. *odorata*) and pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*) extend into somewhat deeper water, although the center of these lakes is open water.

The eastern tract has been managed for several decades under a timber contract with a major forest products company, and pine plantations make up the largest proportion of the proposal acreage. Some of the plantations are on well-drained sandy soils, with some in more mesic to

hydric settings. Pine stands mostly consist of slash pine, but there are some stands of longleaf pine onsite as well. Notably, the plantations were not observed to be bedded. Within the plantations, other trees are not common, but occasional pignut hickory, sweetgum, swamp chestnut oak (*Quercus michauxii*) and live oak can be observed, and on dry sites, sand pine and turkey oak occur. Pasture grasses, mainly bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*) and centipede grass (*Eremochloa ophiuroides*), and weedy native species such as American beautyberry, sand blackberry (*Rubus cuneifolius*) and yankeeweed (*Eupatorium compositifolium*) are often common. However, in one dry site, a variety of remnant sandhill species, including dryland white bluestem (*Andropogon capillipes*), slimleaf pawpaw (*Asimina angustifolia*), woolly pawpaw (*Asimina incana*), capillary hairsedge (*Bulbostylis ciliatifolia*), gopher apple, pineland pinweed (*Lechea sessiliflora*), silkgrass are present, and Chapman's goldenrod (*Solidago chapmanii*) is dominant in the herb layer. Other species in the more xeric pine plantations include Florida rosemary, deer moss (*Cladonia* sp.), Michaux's croton, common persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), pinewoods fingergrass (*Eustachys petraea*), cottonweed (*Froelichia floridana*), pricklypear (*Opuntia* sp.), winged sumac (*Rhus copallinum* var. *copallinum*), tough bully (*Sideroxylon tenax*) and sparkleberry. Tangles of vines, chiefly muscadine and purple passion-flower (*Passiflora incarnata*) sometimes occur. Invasive Natal grass (*Melinis repens* ssp. *repens*) was noted in at least one location. Pocket gopher mounds and at least one active gopher tortoise burrow were observed in dry pine plantation.

Improved pasture also makes up a significant amount of the property (13%), dominating the northern 1/3 of the western tract as well as the northern edge of the eastern tract. Improved pastures on the site are dominated by bahiagrass, often with very little else. Sand blackberry and licoriceweed (*Scoparia dulcis*) are present occasionally.

A large area of pasture on the western tract, and a few small patches of pasture on the eastern tract, contain a significant amount of native vegetation intermixed with areas of bahiagrass. These semi-improved pastures are generally fairly open with scattered sand live oak or live oak. There is a wide variety of other woody species, including pignut hickory, common persimmon, sweetgum, eastern wild black cherry (*Prunus serotina* var. *serotina*), swamp laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*), cabbage palm, saw palmetto, American beautyberry and bully (*Sideroxylon* sp.), although other than cabbage palm, these are typically small-statured. Herbaceous plants are common and are generally a mix of bahiagrass and weedy native species such as bluestem, Michaux's croton, dogfennel, yankeeweed, poor joe (*Hexasepalum teres*), maidencane, muscadine, pricklypear (*Opuntia mesacantha*), sand blackberry, Maryland wild sensitive plant (*Senna marilandica*) and goldenrod (*Solidago* sp.). Invasive torpedo grass (*Panicum repens*) was noted in one location.

Successional hardwood forests, about 7% of the proposal, occur on the eastern tract in a variety of settings. Some have developed in formerly cleared hardwood forests or abandoned pastures or fields; these generally have a canopy of laurel oak, water oak, and/or sweetgum. Herb diversity is often negligible, including variable witchgrass, tall elephantsfoot, partridgeberry, and whip nutrush (*Scleria triglomerata*). Successional hardwood forests that developed from fire-excluded sandhills are much more diverse. These contain large longleaf pine, turkey oak and sand post oak in a closed canopy made up mostly of laurel oak and sand live oak. Herbs and small shrubs in these successional former sandhills include southern wiregrass, Indian-plantain (*Arnoglossum* sp.), woolly pawpaw, soft greeneyes (*Berlandiera pumila* var. *pumila*), sand butterfly pea, spurred butterfly pea (*Centrosema virginianum*), tread softly (*Cnidioscolus stimulosus*), whitemouth dayflower, oblongleaf twinflower (*Dyschoriste*

oblongifolia), tall elephantsfoot, dogtongue wild buckwheat, milkpea (*Galactia* sp.), gopher apple, whitetop aster (*Sericocarpus tortifolius*), kidneyleaf rosinweed (*Silphium compositum*) and queen's delight.

Small amounts of successional hydric shrubland/forest are found on both tracts. The successional hydric area near Fowlers Prairie is similar in composition to the adjacent baygall, with a patchy canopy of young loblolly bay, dahoon and water oak (*Quercus nigra*). A few small, developed areas make up about 1% of the proposal. Developed areas on the western tract include an area with a ca. 1880s homestead and modern sheds/barns, as well as a barn/event venue on the north side of Fowlers Lake, and a house and outbuildings on the west edge of Fowlers Lake. On the larger eastern tract, there are two small, developed areas with residences near the property's north end, as well as a small house associated with an area that was historically a fish camp. A former boat canal dug in the 1950s to connect this area to Levys Prairie is now being colonized by trees and was dry at the time of the site visit. Other land uses make up only a small percent of the proposal. On the western tract, there is one small but deep borrow area that appears to be recently used, and there is one small artificial pond. Networks of unpaved roads traverse both tracts, and a powerline corridor crosses pine plantations on a portion of the eastern tract.

A few invasive species were noted on the property. Tropical soda apple (*Solanum viarum*, Florida Invasive Species Council [FISC] Category 1) is common in semi-improved pastures on the western tract. Patches of rose Natal grass (FISC Category 1) occur in recently planted pine plantation, and isolated camphortree (*Camphora officinarum*, FISC Category 1) and patches of Caesar's weed (*Urena lobata*, FISC Category 1) were also observed on the eastern tract.

Table 1. Natural communities and landcover types within Florida Forever proposal

Community or Landcover	Acres	Percent of Proposal
bottomland forest	76	3
basin marsh	66	3
upland hardwood forest	64	3
wet flatwoods	48	2
baygall	26	1
mesic hammock	24	1
freshwater forested wetlands	21	1
sandhill upland lake	20	1
basin swamp	15	1
sandhill	11	< 1
depression marsh	2	< 1
pine plantation	1,225	54
pasture - improved	288	13
successional hardwood forest	155	7
pasture - semi-improved	109	5
road	55	2
successional hydric shrubland/forest	47	2
developed	14	1
utility corridor	4	< 1
canal/ditch	1	< 1
artificial pond	< 1	< 1
borrow area	< 1	< 1
utility corridor	4	< 1
Total	2,272	100

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

This summary provides an assessment of fish and wildlife resources associated with the Levys Prairie Florida Forever less than fee proposal, based on field observations during the July 8, 2026, site visit, and on associated GIS analysis and review of species population and status resources.

The western (Holder) tract is mostly improved pasture and planted pine silvopasture with palmetto and some native shrubs and groundcover. Oak hammock and some baygall and successional shrub wetland occupy most of the remaining acreage of this tract, along with a spring fed lake. There is also an 11,000 square-foot wedding venue, a small number of livestock (cattle, chickens, donkeys), and some remnant, disturbed sandhill habitat near the lake.

The owner (Smith Family Trust/Shimer) of over $\frac{2}{3}$ of the large tract, the entire central and southern portion which runs along most of the western edge of Levys(wet) Prairie, runs a timber operation of mostly sand pines that appear to be in pulp wood rotation with minimal site prep. Some plant species characteristic of sandhill were observed in multiple planted pine areas and near a sandhill lake. The terrain was gently rolling, with some slope seeps, a seep stream, a couple depression marshes, and some wet flatwoods and basin marsh. The timber company (Rayonier) is terminating their 60-year lease in December 2027. They have expressed interest in buying the property for a gopher tortoise recipient site, but the landowner would like to keep it in the family.

The owner (Sueb) of the northern portion of the large tract raises roughly 100-150 cattle and his parcels include pasture, xeric hammock that was formerly sandhill and approximately 1,500 acres of prairie basin stretching across the northern edge of Levys Prairie. In the remnant sandhill areas, a rare Florida endemic vine was observed alongside longleaf pine and wiregrasses. Recreational hunting of game species occurs throughout. The owner utilizes prescribed fire as a land management tool to benefit populations of deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), quail (*Colinus virginianus*), and waterfowl. He described his intentions to reduce the acreage of pasture/bahiagrass through chemical and mechanical means, followed by longleaf pine planting in cooperation with the Florida Forest Service. In addition, he plans to reduce the oak composition in the relic sandhill areas with fire and chemical or mechanical treatment. The FWC Landowner Assistance Program intends to provide management guidance to improve the habitat for imperiled wildlife species such as the State Threatened gopher tortoise and Federally Threatened eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon couperi*). The owner also works with University of Georgia to study the genetics of game species on the property.

Northern bobwhite quail (, state Species of Greatest Conservation Need [SGCN]) and State Threatened Florida sandhill cranes were observed on the western tract. Gopher tortoise burrows were observed on the southern portion of the large tract, and this owner reported observing an eastern indigo snake within the past six weeks. Florida black bear, including cubs, were reported by all three owners. Other wildlife reportedly seen regularly include bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), turkey, white-tailed deer, and wintering waterfowl. Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and sandhill cranes nests were also reported. Onsite observations confirmed potential habitat for all these species reported by landowners. Potential habitat was also identified on all tracts for imperiled wading birds and the State Threatened Southeastern American kestrel (*Falco sparverius paulus*). The presence of invasive plants was low to

moderate, and invasive hogs (*Sus scrofa*) were reported by all three owners. The FWC is planning to provide hog trapping assistance to all owners.

The FWC Florida Landscape Assessment Model mean score for the proposal is 5.4 (on a 0–10 increasing value scale). The proposal contains designated FWC Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (SHCAs) for five species of varying conservation priority. This includes Priority 2 SHCA (on a 1-5 scale of decreasing priority) for two species: 354 acres for the short-tailed hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*; state SGCN) and 10 acres for the State Threatened striped newt (*Notophthalmus perstriatus*). Additionally, this includes Priority 3 SHCA for two other SGCN, 337 acres for the swallow-tailed kite (*Elanoides forficatus*) and 15 acres for the Florida mouse (*Peromyscus floridanus*). Finally, this includes over 1,825 acres of Priority 5 SHCA for the Florida black bear. FWC monitoring indicates bears are frequent throughout the property. There are also over 1,432 acres designated as Rare Fish Imperiled Waters, with 716 acres for the southern tessellated darter (*Etheostoma olmstedi*), 419 acres for the ironcolor shiner (*Notropis chalybaeus*), and 298 acres for the snail bullhead (*Ameiurus brunneus*). In Florida, the darter is found only in Marion and Putnam counties, mostly in impaired waterways. On-site property evaluation confirmed potential habitat for all these SHCA species.

In summary, the Levys Prairie proposal would provide significant conservation value as a less than fee acquisition. Protection of these lands would add to nearby conservation lands, restrict development, protect habitat for many wildlife species including imperiled and at-risk species, and protect important regional water resources. Some active management by the landowners is an encouraging sign that wildlife habitat could be further improved and sandhill community restoration efforts may occur.

GOALS, MEASURES AND CRITERIA

GOAL A:

ENHANCE THE COORDINATION AND COMPLETION OF LAND ACQUISITION PROJECTS

Measure A1:

The number of acres acquired through the state's land acquisition programs that contribute to the enhancement of essential natural resources, ecosystem service parcels, and connecting linkage corridors as identified and developed by the best available scientific data.

If acquired, all 2,272 acres would contribute to ecosystem service parcels and connecting linkage corridors.

Measure A2:

The number of acres protected through the use of alternatives to fee simple acquisition.

The entirety of the project (2,272 acres) is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition via conservation easement.

GOAL B:

INCREASE THE PROTECTION OF FLORIDA'S BIODIVERSITY AT THE SPECIES, NATURAL COMMUNITY, AND LANDSCAPE LEVELS

Measure B1:

The number of acres acquired of significant Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas.

The SHCA Florida Forever Conservation Needs layer identifies important remaining habitat conservation needs for 62 terrestrial vertebrates on private lands. Priority 1 and 2 represent habitat for species considered imperiled or critically imperiled in Florida. The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation (FFME) table (Appendix B) reports the site contains approximately 2,077 acres (91% of site) of Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas. This is within Priority 5 (60% of site), Priority 2 (16%), and Priority 3 (15%) areas.

Measure B2:

The number of acres acquired of highest priority conservation areas for Florida's rarest species.

Habitat conservation priorities for 634 of Florida's rarest species were mapped and divided into six priority classes. The FFME reports the proposed project contains approximately 1,531 acres (67% of site) of rare species habitat. The habitat is mostly divided between Priority 6 (63% of site) and Priority 5 (5%), with the remainder in Priority 4 (< 1%).

The following table lists the acres of habitat for each species that may be found on the site, based on the FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities. Please note that habitats for these species overlap, so that the sum total of habitat for all species is more than the total acreage of the priority conservation areas. Acreage for aquatic species includes a terrestrial buffer.

Table 2. Rare species habitat based on FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	Acres
<i>Selonodon mandibularis</i>	large-jawed cecrionid beetle	G2G4	34
<i>Drymarchon couperi</i>	eastern indigo snake	G3	97
<i>Lithobates capito</i>	gopher frog	G2G3	964
<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	Florida sandhill crane	G5T2	356
<i>Mycteria americana</i>	wood stork	G4	190

See Appendix D for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

Measure B3:

The number of acres acquired of significant landscapes, landscape linkages, and conservation corridors, giving priority to completing linkages.

The FFME reports approximately 1,983 acres (87%) of the proposed project contributes to protection of ecological greenways, all within Priority 5 areas. Prioritization is based on such factors as importance for wide-ranging species like Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*) and Florida black bear, importance for maintaining a connected reserve network, and riparian corridors.

Measure B4:

The number of acres acquired of under-represented native ecosystems.

The Florida Forever natural community analysis includes only those communities that are under-represented on existing conservation lands. This analysis provides a conservative estimate of the extent of these communities, because it identifies only relatively undisturbed portions of these communities that occur within their historic range. The FFME table lists the acreages of under-represented natural communities found on the site. Based on this analysis, the Levys Prairie proposal contains 64 acres of upland hardwood forest (3% of site), 48 acres of mesic flatwoods (2%), 20 acres of sandhill upland lake (1%), and 11 acres of sandhill (<1%).

Measure B5:

The number of landscape-sized protection areas of at least 50,000 acres that exhibit a mosaic of predominantly intact or restorable natural communities established through new acquisition projects, or augmentations to previous projects.

The Levys Prairie proposal, although adjacent to conservation lands that include Little Orange Creek Preserve, Little Orange Creek Nature Park, and Janes Conservation Easement, would not currently contribute to a contiguous landscape-sized protection area of at least 50,000 acres.

Measure B6:

The percentage increase in the number of occurrences of imperiled species on publicly managed conservation areas.

This site supports potential habitat for some rare species of conservation concern (See Table 3). At least one active gopher tortoise burrow, and multiple Florida sandhill cranes, were observed during the site visit. Florida sandhill cranes and gopher tortoises are increasingly threatened by residential development and conversion to intensive agricultural uses. Southern fox squirrels are reported to be abundant on the property. Rare wading birds are likely to use the wetlands on the proposal, and more extensive surveys may reveal the occurrence of additional rare plant or wildlife species as well.

The FFME table lists the number of Element Occurrences by Global Rank (G-rank) that are found on the proposal. Note that the number of occurrences does not necessarily match the number of species in the following table because a) some species may have more than one occurrence on the proposal site, or b) some species observed on site do not meet the criteria for addition to the FNAI database at this time. The table below contains species falling into any of these observational categories, species gleaned from other sources (e.g., Florida Breeding Bird Atlas) with different degrees of locational precision, and species reported in the application or during the site visit.

Table 3. Rare plants and animals documented or reported to occur within the proposed project

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	State Rank	Federal Status	State Status
Rare plants documented on site					
<i>Centrosema arenicola</i>	sand butterfly pea	G2Q	S2	N	E
Additional rare plants reported on site by applicant					
none					
Rare animals documented on site					
<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>	gopher tortoise	G3	S3	N	ST
<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	Florida sandhill crane	G5T2	S2	N	ST
<i>Elanoides forficatus</i>	swallow-tailed kite	G5	S2	N	N
<i>Ursus americanus floridanus</i>	Florida black bear	G5T4	S4	N	N
Additional rare animals reported on site by applicant					
<i>Drymarchon couperi</i>	eastern indigo snake	G2G3	S2?	T	FT
<i>Puma concolor coryi</i>	Florida panther	G5T1	S1	E	FE
<i>Sciurus niger niger</i>	southern fox squirrel	G5T5	S3	N	N

See Appendix D for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

GOAL C:

PROTECT, RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE QUALITY OF NATURAL FUNCTIONS OF LAND, WATER, AND WETLAND SYSTEMS OF THE STATE

Measure C1:

The number of acres of publicly-owned land identified as needing restoration; enhancement, and management, acres undergoing restoration or enhancement; acres with restoration activities completed, and acres managed to maintain such restored or enhanced conditions; the number of acres which represent actual or potential imperiled species habitat; the number of acres which are available pursuant to a management plan to restore, enhance, repopulate, and manage imperiled species habitat; and the number of acres of imperiled species habitat managed, restored, and enhanced, repopulated, or acquired.

The property is offered for less-than-fee acquisition, intended to be utilized in a manner consistent with existing uses. Bottomland forests and upland hardwood forests on the proposal are in relatively good condition and require little management. The hydrology of ca. 115 acres of basin swamp (Levys Prairie) could potentially be restored or enhanced, but this would reduce or eliminate their utility as pasture. The roughly 1,600 acres of pine plantations and pasture would require considerable long-term commitment to restore to native species, and this likely would not be consistent with the intended uses of the land. However, some areas of pine plantation and semi-improved pasture contain significant amounts of native species; the habitat value of these areas could be enhanced with the regular use of prescribed fire. An undetermined acreage of former sandhill has become successional hardwood forest due to an absence of fire; if resources were available, these could be enhanced or restored through a combination of fire and removal of mesophytic hardwoods.

Invasive plant control needs of the property appear to be relatively minor. Only a handful of invasive species were noted during the site visit, although comprehensive surveys have not been conducted. A baseline assessment to determine the full extent of invasive species is warranted if acquisition of an easement occurs.

Measure C3:

The percentage completion of targeted capital improvements in surface water improvement and management plans created under s. 373.453 (2), regional or master stormwater management system plans, or other adopted restoration plans.

The project area is located within the BMAP for Silver Springs, Silver Springs Group and Upper Silver River (2015). Since 2014, the SJRWMD's cost-share program has partnered to award over \$26.9 million dollars in funding to improvements within the Silver Springs BMAP zone. This funding has gone toward improvements on 31 different projects focused on agricultural Best Management Practices, wastewater treatment and sewer upgrades, septic-to-sewer conversions, stormwater improvements, other water quality improvements and aquifer recharge. To date, approximately 95% of the awarded project improvements have been completed.

The Silver Springs BMAP includes a land conservation strategy to address water quality within this basin. The BMAP identifies 14 land purchases totaling 48,990 acres. Currently, approximately 134,095 acres of conservation land is protected within the BMAP footprint. Protecting the project area from land use change will help to reduce future water quality impacts to Silver Springs, the Upper Floridan Aquifer and Upper Silver River. Protection of land within the project area will also contribute to sustaining aquifer recharge capacity in this region.

The project area is also located within the eastern Orange Creek Basin. This basin is subject to both a BMAP (initially adopted – 2008, Phase 2 – 2014, amended – 2019, updated – 2025) and a Surface Water Improvement and Management Plan (initially adopted – 1996, updated – 2011). Since 2015, the SJRWMD's cost-share program has partnered to award over \$1.75 million dollars in funding to improvements within the Orange Creek Basin. This funding has

gone toward improvements on 15 different projects focused on agricultural Best Management Practices, wastewater treatment and sewer upgrades, septic-to-sewer conversions, stormwater improvements, other water quality improvements, and aquifer recharge. To date, approximately 87% of the awarded projects have been completed.

The Orange Creek Basin BMAP includes a land conservation strategy to address water quality within this basin. The BMAP identifies 45 land acquisition projects. Of these, the BMAP identifies 40 acquisitions that have been completed. Protecting the project area from land use change will help to reduce future water quality impacts to Orange Creek. Protection of land within the project area will also contribute to sustaining aquifer recharge capacity in this region. Given the significance of this area to regional surface and groundwater resources, the following terms should be pursued by the State when negotiating acquisition within the project area: enroll all agricultural and silvicultural operations in applicable Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Best Management Practices; limit construction of impervious surfaces; prohibit ditching or drainage of wetlands or uplands to divert water off property; limit harvest of trees in forested wetlands; require invasive species management; prohibit introduction of invasive species; prohibit supplemental irrigation of cattle pastures; prohibit application of biosolids (Class B, compost or amendments that contain any biosolid components); use wildlife friendly fences; prohibit consumptive use of water for export off property (wellfields, bottling, etc.).

Measure C4:

The number of acres acquired that protect natural floodplain functions.

The FFME reports approximately 609 acres (27%) of the proposed project may contribute to the protection of natural floodplain function. This area is mostly divided between Priority 2 (14% of site), Priority 3 (12%), and Priority 4 (1%), with the remainder in Priorities 1 and 5 (each with < 1%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C5:

The number of acres acquired that protect surface waters of the State.

The FFME reports approximately 2,266 acres (100%) of the proposed project could provide protection for those surface waters of the State that currently remain in good condition. This area is divided between Priority 7 (82% of site), Priority 6 (12%), and Priority 4 (6%), with the remainder in Priority 5 (less than 1%). These areas represent acreage that contributes to the protection of state-designated Outstanding Florida Waters, springs, rare fish habitat or other surface waters.

Measure C7:

The number of acres acquired that protect fragile coastal resources.

The FFME reports that no part of the proposed project includes fragile coastal resources like coastal wetlands, imperiled coastal lakes, and fragile coastal uplands.

Measure C8:

The number of acres of functional wetland systems protected.

The FFME reports approximately 393 acres (17%) of the proposed project would provide protection for functional wetland systems. This area is divided between Priority 2 (9% of site) and Priority 3 (8%), with less than 1% in each of Priorities 4, 5 and 1. Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

GOAL D:

ENSURE THAT SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES OF WATER ARE AVAILABLE TO MEET THE CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF NATURAL SYSTEMS AND THE CITIZENS OF THE STATE

Measure D1:

The number of acres acquired which provide retention and storage of surface water in naturally occurring storage areas, such as lakes and wetlands, consistent with the maintenance of water resources or water supplies and consistent with district water supply plans.

The project area lies within the North Florida Regional Water Supply Plan region. Based on SJRWMD wetland vegetation coverage GIS data, approximately 392 acres of naturally occurring storage areas, including lakes and freshwater wetlands are included in the project area. These retention and storage areas contribute to the maintenance of water resources and water supply within the Silver Springs springshed and the Ocklawaha River watershed. Additionally, approximately 1,700 acres—more than 70%—of the project area lies within areas identified by the SJRWMD as exhibiting high Upper Floridan Aquifer recharge.

Measure D2:

The quantity of water made available through the water resource development component of a district water supply plan for which a water management district is responsible.

The North Florida Regional Water Supply Plan identifies a total of 22 water resource development project options. The listed project options have an estimated total water supply benefit of 51.2 million gallons per day. Notably, groundwater recharge projects contribute significantly to the overall benefit, accounting for 32.7 million gallons per day. None of the currently identified project options fall within the footprint of the Levys Prairie project.

Measure D3:

The number of acres acquired of groundwater recharge areas critical to springs, sinks, aquifers, other natural systems, or water supply.

The FFME reports approximately 2,272 acres (100%) of the proposed project would provide protection for groundwater recharge areas. This area is divided between Priority 5 (46% of site), Priority 4 (28%), Priority 3 (23%), and Priority 2 (2%). Prioritization is based on features that contribute to aquifer vulnerability such as swallets, thickness of the intermediate aquifer confining unit and closed topographical depressions, as well as areas within springshed protection zones and in proximity to public water supply wells.

Table 4. Spatial Analysis for Potential Water Quality Benefits of Levys Prairie

Categories	Scoring Criteria	Project Score
FDEP High Profile Springs (In 1,2,3 or > spring sheds)	12, 24, 36	
FDEP Select Agricultural Land Use (0-30%, >30-65%, >65%)	4,8,12	4
FDEP Florida Aquifer Vulnerability (FAVA)	4,7,10	10
FDEP Special Nutrient Impaired WBIDs	9	
FDEP Distance to Major Lakes (100, 500, 1000 meters)	8,7,6	8
FDEP Springsheds or within 5 miles	10, 7	10
FDEP BMAPs	10	10

FDEP Distance to Major Rivers (100, 500, 1000 meters)	6,5,4	
Total Possible	101	42

GIS Evaluation score is converted to a 1 to 5 value (low to high)

FINAL DEAR SCORE = 3, medium water quality protection benefits

GOAL E:

INCREASE NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED PUBLIC RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Measure E2:

The miles of trails that are available for public recreation, giving priority to those that provide significant connections including those that will assist in completing the Florida National Scenic Trail.

The FFME reports that 4.5 miles of the land trail priorities and opportunities identified by the Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan (2023 update) come within a quarter mile of the proposal.

GOAL F:

PRESERVE SIGNIFICANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL OR HISTORIC SITES

Measure F1:

The increase in the number of and percentage of historic and archaeological properties listed in the Florida Master Site File or National Register of Historic Places which are protected or preserved for public use.

The Levys Prairie Florida Forever proposal contains two archaeological sites listed in the Florida Master Site File.

Measure F2:

The increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in state ownership.

Acquisition of the Levys Prairie Florida Forever Project would not meet Measure F2, as it would not result in an increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in *state ownership*.

CULTURAL RESOURCES:

According to the Division of Historical Resource's (DHR) Florida Master Site File, there are two recorded archaeological sites within the boundary of the Levys Prairie Florida Forever Project. PU1183 (Levys Prairie I) is an undated lithic scatter. PU02495 (Levys Prairie Homestead) is a newly recorded site identified during the field assessment consisting of a remarkably intact homestead dating to the late nineteenth century. Features of the site include a Cracker house, syrup kettles, stone well, and privy holes.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS:

DHR staff observed PU1183 in maintenance condition and recorded PU02495 during the field review. The Cracker house within PU02495 was observed in fair condition, reportedly suffering tornado damage within the past few years. Because of its context within the broader intact homestead landscape, efforts to provide preservation treatment to the house are recommended. Should any artifacts or other cultural resources be discovered in the future, DHR recommends leaving them in place and contacting DHR's Public Lands Archaeology Program for further evaluation.

GOAL G:

INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF FORESTLAND AVAILABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Measure G1:

The number of acres acquired that are available for sustainable forest management.

Much of the upland silvicultural areas are in good condition for restoration without significant effort. Areas planted in longleaf already have adequate native groundcover. The reintroduction of fire into longleaf stands would be the only immediate need to begin restoration activities. In planted slash and sand pine areas, stand conversion is recommended.

The FFME reports approximately 1,341 acres (59% of site) could be available for sustainable forest management, divided between Priority 4 (1,144 acres), Priority 3 (118 acres), Priority 5 (65 acres) and Priority 2 (14 acres). Prioritization is based on 8 criteria set by the Florida Forest Service: whether trees are natural or planted, size of tract, distance to market, average total height that dominant and codominant pine trees obtain, access/operability, burn frequency, years since last burn and landscape integrity.

Measure G4:

The percentage and number of acres identified for restoration restored by reforestation.

Although the property is currently forested with no immediate needs for restoration, approximately 1,000 acres, or 40% of the site is identified for restoration restored by reforestation. This includes stands with off-site pine within the sandhill and sandhill habitat that would benefit from prescribed fire.

CRITERIA

The proposed project meets the following Florida Forever criteria (§ 259.105, F.S.)

- (9) (a) The project meets multiple goals described in subsection (4).
- (b) The project is part of an ongoing governmental effort to restore, protect, or develop land areas or water resources.
- (c) The project enhances or facilitates management of properties already under public ownership.
- (d) The project has significant archaeological or historic value.
- (f) The project contributes to the solution of water resource problems on a regional basis.
- (k) The project may be acquired, in whole or in part, using alternatives to fee simple, including but not limited to, tax incentives, mitigation funds, or other revenues, the purchase of development rights, hunting rights, agricultural or silvicultural rights, or mineral rights or obtaining conservation easements or flowage easements.

- (10) The Acquisition and Restoration Council shall give increased priority to:
- (c) Projects that can be acquired in less than fee ownership, such as a permanent conservation easement;
 - (d) Projects that contribute to improving the quality and quantity of surface water and groundwater;
 - (e) Projects that contribute to improving the water quality and flow of springs; and,

MANAGEMENT

If acquired as a perpetual conservation easement, the primary management responsibility would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management would occur to confirm continued compliance with the conditions of the easement. Monitoring would be coordinated by the Office of Environmental Services within the FDEP's Division of State Lands.

FUNDING SOURCES

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

FUNDING FOR MAPPING, APPRAISAL, NEGOTIATIONS & CLOSING

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

OWNERSHIP PATTERN AND ACQUISITION PLANNING

Title and Legal Access Issues, Jurisdictional and Sovereignty Lands, Legal Issues

Record of title, a designation of jurisdictional and sovereignty lands and any other legal issues will be determined at the time of acquisition. Since this property borders Levys Prairie, the boundary of sovereign submerged lands will need to be clarified during due diligence for acquisition.

Known Encumbrances (easement, long-term leases, restrictive covenants, etc.)

The easements and encumbrances of record would be determined during the appraisal mapping. A current title commitment would be obtained, or the owner's title insurance policy would be depicted or noted on the appraisal map.

Description and location of hazardous waste sites, dumps, borrow pits

There are no apparent contamination sites within the project based on the application form.

Estimated Cost of Appraisal and Mapping

DEP Bureau of Appraisal estimates \$10,000 to \$20,000 in appraisal fees.

Acquisition Phases

Subject to funding, Levys Prairie Florida Forever project will be phased based upon price.

GOVERNMENT PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT**Contribution to Recreation and Open Space Needs**

As the acquisition is proposed as a less-than-fee project, there are limited public use opportunities.

Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Spaces

Low-Moderate Potential: Given the overall potential for subdivision, conversion, and/or development, the property would be at a low to moderate risk of losing significant hydrological and floodplain functions and wildlife habitat. The site supports or provided habitat for gopher tortoise, black bear, bobcat, fox squirrel, and various resident and migratory bird species. Development would likely result in habitat fragmentation and degradation of aquifer recharge capability.

Potential for Being Subdivided

Moderate Potential: While there are no current plans for development on the subject properties, there are multiple platted subdivisions and active sand mines that abut the project boundary. There is a moderate risk of the subject parcels being subdivided or converted to another land use.

Zoning and Densities within the Project Boundaries

Agricultural uses are those related to the production, keeping, or maintenance, whether for sale or personal use, of plants and animals for food, forage, fiber, or ornamental purposes. Agricultural uses are characterized as predominantly outdoor activities, with structures covering a very small portion of the land and include aquaculture activities. However, some specific production activities may require relatively large amounts of land coverage, such as greenhouses.

Existing Land Uses and Future Land Use Designations

Existing Land Uses: This project is composed of 22 parcels and is a mix of silviculture, wetlands, intact natural areas, and improved pasture for cattle herding and grazing activities. Approximately half of the project is currently utilized for timber production. Three separate ownerships are included within this project, with each property containing a residence and various agricultural structures.

Future Land Use Designation: The Agriculture category on the FLUM consists of areas used for cropland, pasture/rangeland, silviculture and other agricultural activities, vacant land, and residential parcels of land. It is intended that a large share of this land will remain in active agricultural production in the future. The Agriculture FLUM category allows several permissible uses including intensive agricultural uses, some residential development, commercial and industrial uses, community facilities and services, resource-based recreational uses, and rural residential uses. The maximum permitted residential density in the Agriculture FLUM category is one dwelling unit per 10 acres. This comes out to a maximum development potential of approximately 250 dwelling units.

Development Potential

Low Potential: The development potential of the subject properties is currently low. The current land use category and zoning are agriculture which promotes less density and intensity of development potential than other suburban or urban land uses. The subject sites do currently abut properties that are subdivided and designated for more dense and intense land uses.

Transportation Planning Issues

The proposed project is located in the Florida Department of Transportation District 2 in the most western part of Putnam County. The proposed project is surrounded by a rural community with businesses and homes. Partial areas of the most northeastern part of the parcel lie within Levys Prairie Lake. Certain segments of the western project parcel cover portions of Fowlers Lake and Fowlers Prairie Lake. The proposed project is split by State Road (SR) 21 and runs the entire 3.5 miles north and south through the proposed site. SR 20 is located immediately south of the property using the road as a border, U.S. Highway 301/SR 200 is less than 3 miles west of the parcel and an active Atlantic Coast rail main line less than 3 miles southwest are all Strategic Intermodal System facilities but will not have an impact on the roadway or have any plans that could be impacted in the future. SR 20 and U.S. Highway 301/SR 200 are both designated evacuation routes. The surrounding area located 2 miles south and 5 miles west is the Florida Wildlife Corridor. There is a wildlife crossing near this project area location on SR 20, with no additional wildlife crossings being needed in this vicinity.

While Florida Department of Transportation finds no adverse impacts to the proposed project at this time, coordination with Florida Department of Transportation's District 2 staff during the acquisition process is recommended to address any transportation system issues that may arise in the future and incorporate them into the management plan as appropriate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Staff in FDEP's DSL and the Florida Natural Areas Inventory determined the final project recommendations. Diana Pepe, Paige Kraker and Katie Ramirez in DSL's Office of Environmental Services were responsible for the overall coordination of this report, with contributions from the following:

- Division of Historical Resources: Brandon Ackermann
- Florida Forest Service: Cat Ingram and Jesse Frazier
- Florida Natural Areas Inventory: Geoff Parks and Kim Alexander
- Department of Commerce: Yazmin Valdez and David Pullin
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: Jason Ballard, Dean Cox, and Donna Marain
- DEP Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration: Moira Homann and Kenneth Weaver
- Florida Department of Transportation: Emily Rhodes
- St. Johns River Water Management District: Brent Bachelder

APPENDICES**Appendix A:**

Final FF measures table: Report requirement 259.105 (15)d, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

Levys Prairie: Florida Forever Measures Evaluation 20260725

GIS ACRES = 2,272

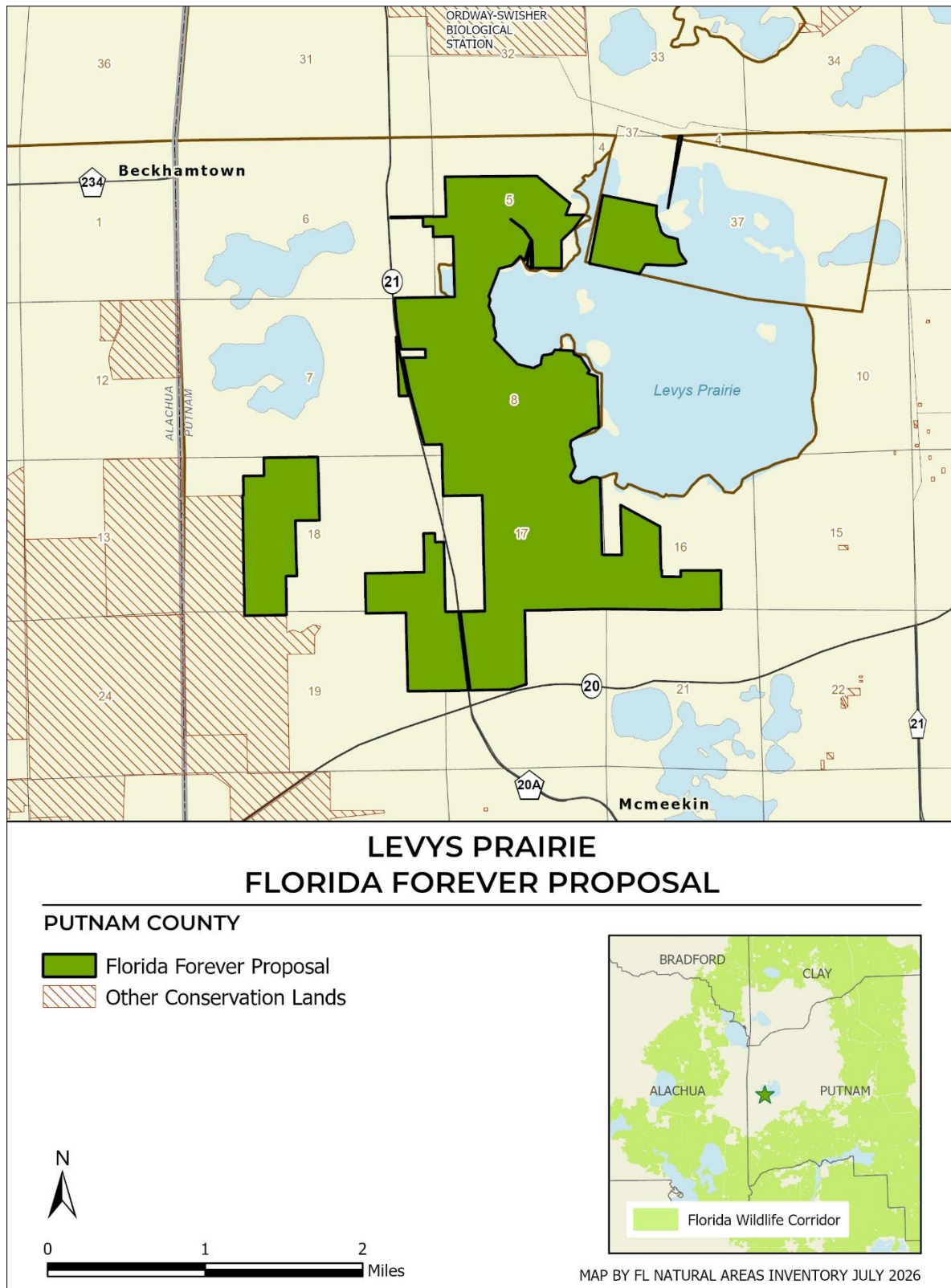
MEASURES	Resource Acres ²	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	362	16%
Priority 3	348	15%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	1,367	60%
Total Acres	2,077	91%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	2	< 1%
Priority 5	103	5%
Priority 6	1,426	63%
Total Acres	1,531	67%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	1,983	87%
Total Acres	1,983	87%
B4: Under-represented Natural Communities		
Upland Glade (G1)		0%
Pine Rockland (G1)	0	0%
Scrub and Scrubby Flatwoods (G2)	0	0%
Rockland Hammock (G2)	0	0%
Dry Prairie (G2)	0	0%
Seepage Slope (G2)	0	0%
Sandhill (G3)	11	< 1%
Sandhill Upland Lake (G3)	20	1%
Upland Pine (G3)	0	0%
Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4)	48	2%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	64	3%
Total Acres	143	6%
B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species		
G1	0	
G2	2	
G3	1	
G4	1	
G5	0	
Total	4	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	3	< 1%
Priority 2	308	14%
Priority 3	263	12%
Priority 4	32	1%
Priority 5	2	< 1%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	609	27%

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres ²	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	137	6%
Priority 5	5	< 1%
Priority 6	270	12%
Priority 7	1,854	82%
Total Acres	2,266	100%
C7: Fragile Coastal Resources		
Fragile Coastal Uplands	0	0%
Imperiled Coastal Lakes	0	0%
Coastal Wetlands	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
C8: Functional Wetlands		
Priority 1	2	< 1%
Priority 2	197	9%
Priority 3	187	8%
Priority 4	4	< 1%
Priority 5	3	< 1%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	393	17%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	55	2%
Priority 3	526	23%
Priority 4	636	28%
Priority 5	1,056	46%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	2,272	100%
E2: Recreational Trails (miles)		
(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)		
Land Trail Priorities	1.0	
Land Trail Opportunities	3.5	
Total Miles	4.5	
F2: Arch. & Historical Sites (number)		
	1 sites	
G1: Sustainable Forestry		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	14	< 1%
Priority 3	118	5%
Priority 4	1,144	50%
Priority 5	65	3%
Total Acres	1,341	59%
G3: Forestland for Recharge		
	205	9%

*Acres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted. This analysis converts site boundary into pixels, which causes slight differences from GIS acres; this effect is most noticeable on small sites.

Appendix B:

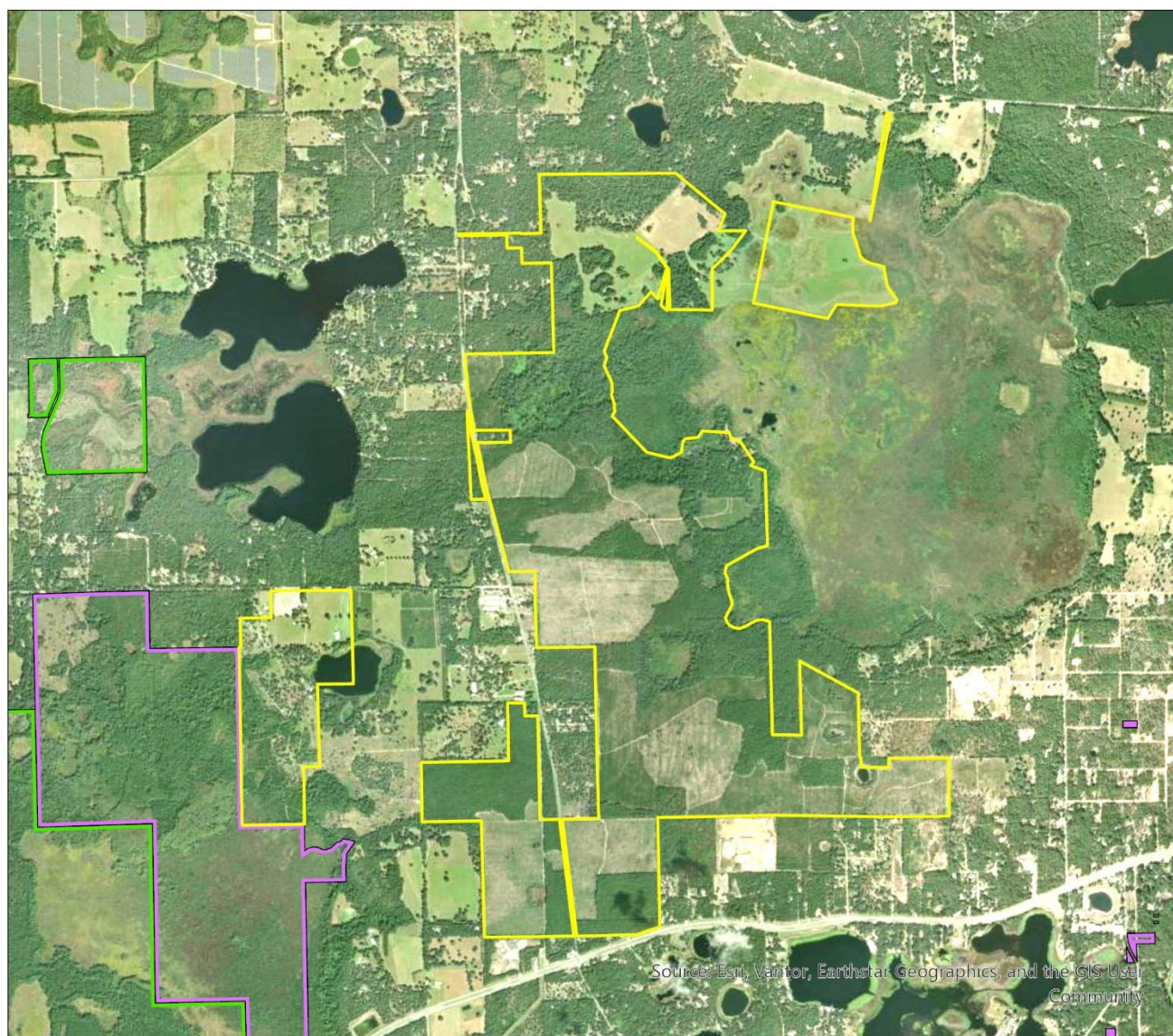
Final FF proposal boundary maps: Report requirement 259.105 (15)k, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

B1: Florida Forever map

B2: Aerial map

LEVYS PRAIRIE FLORIDA FOREVER PROPOSAL

FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSAL BOUNDARY AS OF JULY 2026

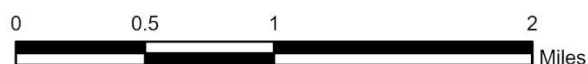


Map Produced by: FL Natural Areas Inventory, N. Pasco, July 2026

Background: ESRI World Imagery



- Florida Forever Proposal Boundary
- Existing Local Conservation Lands
- Existing Private Conservation Lands



Appendix C:
PROPERTY ID #'S FOR FINAL RECOMMENDED BOUNDARY

County	Parcel ID	Owner	Acres	Just (Market) Value	Parcel Designation
Putnam	05-10-23-0000-0040-0010	Prairie Oaks Farm LLC	279.97	\$1,039,680	Essential
Putnam	05-10-23-0000-0060-0110	Prairie Oaks Farm LLC	10.28	\$125,720	Essential
Putnam	05-10-23-0000-0080-0000	Prairie Oaks Farm LLC	1.99	\$14,700	Essential
Putnam	05-10-23-0000-0100-0000	Prairie Oaks Farm LLC	10.16	\$59,400	Essential
Putnam	06-10-23-0000-0010-0110	Prairie Oaks Farm LLC	3.4	\$49,050	Essential
Putnam	37-10-23-0000-0010-0000	Prairie Oaks Farm LLC	129.5	\$388,024	Essential
Putnam	08-10-23-0000-0020-0000	Linda M. Smith and Leon S. Preston	69.28	\$391,932.0	Essential
Putnam	07-10-23-0000-0010-0000	Leon Shimer Trustee Smith Family	39.91	\$200,300	Essential
Putnam	07-10-23-0000-0060-0000	Leon Shimer Trustee Smith Family	53.5	\$275,950	Essential
Putnam	07-10-23-0000-0080-0000	Leon Shimer Trustee Smith Family	29.04	\$225,440	Essential
Putnam	18-10-23-0000-0130-0000	Leon Shimer Trustee Smith Family	100.53	\$293,700	Essential
Putnam	19-10-23-0000-0020-0000	Leon Shimer Trustee Smith Family	80.63	\$236,330	Essential
Putnam	20-10-23-0000-0140-0000	Leon Shimer Trustee Smith Family	155.68	\$452,980	Essential
Putnam	17-10-23-0000-0030-0000	Leon Shimer Trustee Smith Family	443.91	\$1,155,900	Essential
Putnam	16-10-23-0000-0020-0000	Shi Anne Smith Shimer	179.09	\$525,030	Essential
Putnam	17-10-23-0000-0020-0000	Smith Family Trust	2.24	\$24,640	Essential
Putnam	08-10-23-0000-0030-0000	Preston Leon Shimer et. al.	389.66	\$1,040,490	Essential
Putnam	17-10-23-0000-0050-0000	Preston Leon Shimer	51.48	\$275,340	Essential
Putnam	17-10-23-0000-0060-0000	Preston Leon Shimer	9.94	\$110,880	Essential
Putnam	18-10-23-0000-0060-0010	Keith M. and Diana L. Holder	141.75	\$684,820	Essential
Putnam	18-10-23-0000-0060-0021	Keith M. and Diana L. Holder	64.82	\$303,516	Essential
Putnam	18-10-23-0000-0060-0030	Keith M. and Diana L. Holder	24.93	\$124,810	Essential
		TOTAL	2,271.7	\$7,998,632	

Appendix D:

Imperiled Species FNAI Ranking Definitions

FNAI GLOBAL ELEMENT RANK

- G1** = Critically imperiled globally because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- G2** = Imperiled globally because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- G3** = Either very rare and local throughout its range (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.
- G4** = Apparently secure globally (may be rare in parts of range).
- G5** = Demonstrably secure globally.
- GH** = Of historical occurrence throughout its range, may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).
- GX** = Believed to be extinct throughout range.
- GXC** = Extirpated from the wild but still known from captivity or cultivation.
- G#?** = Tentative rank (e.g., G2?).
- G#G#** = Range of rank; insufficient data to assign specific global rank (e.g., G2G3).
- G#T#** = Rank of a taxonomic subgroup such as a subspecies or variety; the G portion of the rank refers to the entire species and the T portion refers to the specific subgroup; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G3T1).
- G#Q** = Rank of questionable species - ranked as species but questionable whether it is species or subspecies; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G2Q).
- G#T#Q** = Same as above, but validity as subspecies or variety is questioned.
- GU** = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned (e.g., GUT2).
- GNA** = Ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).
- GNR** = Element not yet ranked (temporary).
- GNRTNR** = Neither the element nor the taxonomic subgroup has yet been ranked.

FNAI STATE ELEMENT RANK

- S1** = Critically imperiled in Florida because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- S2** = Imperiled in Florida because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- S3** = Either very rare and local in Florida (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.
- S4** = Apparently secure in Florida (may be rare in parts of range).
- S5** = Demonstrably secure in Florida.
- SH** = Of historical occurrence in Florida, possibly extirpated, but may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).
- SX** = Believed to be extirpated throughout Florida.
- SU** = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned.
- SNA** = State ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).
- SNR** = Element not yet ranked (temporary).

Appendix E:
Site Visit Photos



Historic homesite



Sand butterfly pea (State Endangered)



Upland sandhill lake



Pocket gopher mounds



Cattle



Gopher tortoise burrow



Seepage stream



Large sweet gum

Florida Forever Project Evaluation Report

New River Watershed Union County



Acquisition Type: Less-Than-Fee
Acres: 1,370
Just Value: \$2,367,894
Application Date: April 15, 2026
Project Sponsors: Saunders Real Estate

Prepared By:
Division of State Lands
Office of Environmental Services



Submitted to the Acquisition and Restoration Council
October 9, 2026

Executive Summary

The New River Watershed Florida Forever proposal contains seven parcels owned by Shirley and Canova Howard, totaling approximately 1,370 acres in Union County. The property is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition with a tax assessed value of \$2,367,894.

The proposal is made up of two disjunct tracts located about 2.7 miles apart, currently used for silviculture and cattle ranching with approximately 150 head of cattle. The southern tract sits on the northern bank of the New River and includes an inholding owned by the Board of Trustees. Much of the uplands on the property have been converted to planted pine and pasture, with approximately one-third of the proposal remaining in natural condition. The most notable natural community type on the New River Watershed is the bottomland forest associated with Fivemile Creek and the New River's floodplain. Channels of the New River observed on the property during the site assessment were not flooded but did contain mature pond cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*).

The proposal is in an area of Union County largely devoid of conservation lands. A vast majority of the site (96%) lies within Priority 4 of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network, which is designed to protect linkage corridors for rare, imperiled, and long-ranging species. A portion of the proposal is also within the Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor, a 100 mile long, 1.6 million-acre landscape of public and private lands that connect the Ocala and Osceola National Forests. A flock of swallow-tailed kites (*Elanoides forficatus*) were observed on the property during the site assessment, along with wood storks (*Mycteria americana*), both of which are Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). Several state and federally protected species occur in the New River. Acquisition of this property would contribute to conservation in a sensitive area of the state lacking protected lands.

The southern tract of the proposal includes approximately 2.2 miles of frontage along the New River. Fivemile Creek flows through the northern tract and privately owned lands before reaching the southern tract and eventually the New River. The New River Watershed lies within the Suwannee River Water Management District's Eastern Water Supply Planning Area and the Santa Fe Basin Management Action Plan. According to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), the entirety of the proposal contributes to surface water protection (see Appendix A).

Several archaeological and historic sites are included within the New River Watershed proposal including a multi-component 19th century homestead and several areas of precontact lithic scatter. While these historic sites would not meet Measure F, because the property is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition, a conservation easement on the proposal would protect the archaeological and historic resources within the project.

If approved for addition to the 2027 Florida Forever Priority List, the proposal should be considered as a standalone project in the Critical Natural Lands category. All ±1,370 proposed for acquisition are considered essential due to the resources documented on the property (see Appendix C). An interagency team conducted a site visit on June 24, 2026. Information included in this report is a result of the site visit.

PURPOSE FOR ACQUISITION

The New River Watershed proposal would help to protect the water quality and quantity of the New River, its tributaries, and its floodplain. This property contributes to conservation in an area of the state largely lacking in conservation lands. New River Watershed will help to protect habitat for rare and imperiled species such as the swallow-tailed kite, Florida mapleleaf, and wood stork.

Acquisition of this project would meet the following Florida Forever Goals, Criteria and Priorities:

Goal	Criteria		Priority	
A ☒	(a) ☒	(h) ☐	(a) ☐	(h) ☐
B ☒	(b) ☒	(i) ☐	(b) ☐	
C ☒	(c) ☐	(j) ☐	(c) ☒	
D ☒	(d) ☒	(k) ☒	(d) ☒	
E ☐	(e) ☐	(l) ☐	(e) ☒	
F ☐	(f) ☒		(f) ☐	
G ☒	(g) ☐		(g) ☐	
H ☐				
I ☐				

*Projects proposed to be funded pursuant to Section 259.105(3)(b), F.S., must meet at least one of the criteria outlined under Section 259.105(9), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0021, F.A.C., and shall meet at least two of the Florida Forever goals and measures outlined in Section 259.105(4), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0022, F.A.C.

LOCATION AND PROXIMITY TO OTHER MANAGED AREAS

Located in Union County, the New River Watershed proposal consists of two tracts separated by approximately 2.7 miles and totaling ca. 1,369.8 acres. The property is proposed for less-than-fee protection.

The larger southern tract (1,126 acres) is situated about 4 miles south of Lake Butler, on the north bank of the New River. The northern tract (ca. 243 acres) is located northwest of the southern tract and 3 miles west-southwest of Lake Butler, north of State Road 121. There are few conservation lands near the proposal. The nearest conservation land, Olustee Creek Conservation Area, is 1 mile northeast of the northern tract; Pareners Branch Conservation Area, Graham Conservation Area (both Suwannee River Water Management District), New River, Running Over Ranch, and Weyerhaeuser Conservation Easements, Stevens-Gracy Trail, Palatka-to-Lake Butler Trail, and Santa Fe River Preserve are all within 5 miles; and several additional conservation lands, mainly along the Santa Fe River, are within 10 miles. A

handful of potential trail sections in the Strategic Managed Area Lands List Florida Forever Project are the only unacquired Florida Forever projects within 5 miles; the Raiford to Osceola Greenway and San Felasco Conservation Corridor Florida Forever projects are within 10 miles. County Road 231 borders the southern tract on the east side for about 1 mile. A small piece at the northwest corner of the northern tract is split off by SW 98th street, which passes through the tract for ca. 0.2 miles.

RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

Florida Natural Areas Inventory

This evaluation is based on information gathered from the proposal, field observations, aerial photography, U.S. Geological Survey 7.5' topographic maps, Cooperative Land Cover data (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission [FWC] and FNAI, Florida Cooperative Land Cover Map, version 4.0), the FNAI Natural Heritage database, and other publicly available GIS data sources. A site visit was conducted on June 24, 2026 by the Acquisition and Restoration Council liaison staff, including FNAI scientists Kim Alexander and Gwen Iacona.

The smaller northern tract is hilly, with elevations up to ca. 135 feet above sea level surrounding the valleys of upper Fivemile Creek and two small tributaries that flow into the creek. Fivemile Creek enters at the northwestern edge of the southern tract and flows into New River near the property's southwestern corner. The southern tract consists mostly of low-lying, relatively level areas (65-70 feet above sea level) adjacent to New River which it fronts for ca. 2.2 miles. The northern part of the tract contains hills that rise to about 110 feet above the floodplain. The higher elevations have well-defined drainages, whereas the channel of Fivemile Creek is broad and diffuse.

About 34% of the site is in relatively natural condition, with both tracts containing a mix of land uses. The most notable natural community on the site is a broad area of bottomland forest that covers the floodplain of the New River and the lower portions of the floodplain of Fivemile Creek. This is a mostly hardwood-dominated forested wetland somewhat intermediate to upland hardwood forest in species composition. The closed canopy contains a diversity of mature wetland and upland tree species including red maple (*Acer rubrum*), green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), ogeechee tupelo (*Nyssa ogeche*), spruce pine (*Pinus glabra*), loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*), bastard white oak (*Quercus austrina*), swamp laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*), swamp chestnut oak (*Quercus michauxii*), live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) and American elm (*Ulmus americana*). The well-developed subcanopy contains American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana* var. *caroliniana*), water hickory (*Carya aquatica*), parsley hawthorn (*Crataegus marshallii*) and eastern hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*). The understory is an open layer of mostly bluestem palmetto (*Sabal minor*) with a few other species such as bedstraw St. John's wort (*Hypericum galioides*). Trumpet creeper vines (*Campsis radicans*) are found throughout, while herbs tend to be concentrated along vehicle trails. This area of bottomland forest is fairly dry, but overflow channels of the New River are common. These were not flooded during the site visit but contain mature pond cypress trees.

Although most uplands on the site have been converted to pasture or pine plantation, the northern tract does have a mix of remnant wet and mesic flatwoods. Dense pines were logged from around 90 acres of pine flatwoods sometime just before 2017. These areas are lacking a canopy, with the exception of a few widely spaced pines, and have a disturbed, mostly shrub-

dominated groundcover. Another 38 acres of remnant flatwoods were recently logged, leaving behind an open canopy of mostly hardwoods such as sweetgum, swamp laurel oak, water oak (*Quercus nigra*) and live oak, plus a few larger slash pines (*Pinus elliottii*) that could not be processed in a sawmill. More mesic sites have a mix of saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), gallberry (*Ilex glabra*) and southern bayberry (*Morella cerifera*) in the shrub layers, along with scattered small trees of common persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*) and vines of yellow jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*), muscadine (*Muscadinia rotundifolia*) and earleaf greenbrier (*Smilax auriculata*). The recently logged sites were still quite open, with soil disturbance from heavy equipment. Herbs are limited to scattered witchgrass (*Dichanthelium* sp.) and tailed bracken (*Pteridium pseudocaudatum*). Wetter sites that had not been recently disturbed have a continuous shrubby groundcover of blue huckleberry (*Gaylussacia tomentosa*), large gallberry (*Ilex coriacea*), gallberry, swamp bay (*Tamala palustris*) and fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*), with infrequent saw palmetto. Small trees of red maple, loblolly bay (*Gordonia lasianthus*), sweetbay (*Magnolia virginiana* var. *australis*) and swamp tupelo (*Nyssa biflora*) are occasional throughout. Herbs are concentrated along roads and in small openings. These include Virginia chain fern (*Anchistea virginica*), bluestem (*Andropogon* sp.), whitehead bogbutton (*Lachnocaulon anceps*), savannah meadowbeauty (*Rhexia alifanus*), pale meadowbeauty (*Rhexia mariana* var. *mariana*), Nuttall's meadowbeauty (*Rhexia nuttallii*), yellow hatpins (*Syngonanthus flavidulus*) and yellow-eyed grass (*Xyris* sp.).

A few swamps are found on the proposal, mostly on the southern tract where at least eight small dome swamps ranging in size from less than one acre up to six acres are embedded in pastures and pine plantation. Some of these may have once been connected to the larger matrix of forested wetlands on the property. They are characterized by a canopy of pond cypress, but other flood-tolerant trees such as red maple, sweetgum, swamp tupelo and water oak are also common. Particularly in grazed areas, the understory may be quite open but with scattered shrubs and small trees. Cattle disturbance also promotes the weedy non-native alligator weed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*).

The west side of the southern tract has a large basin wetland with outflow southward to the New River floodplain. Much of this wetland was logged just prior to 2017, with some sections logged out much earlier than that. However, some small sections are still forested with young basin swamp species including pond cypress, red maple, dahoon (*Ilex cassine*) and American elm.

Logged swamps are classified here as successional hydric shrubland/forests. These generally lack a canopy other than some remnant swamp trees. The open groundcover with an abundance of herbs and scattered shrubs and thicket can resemble a marsh, and this community grades into the surrounding improved pasture. Weedy species typical of cattle-grazed wetlands are common, such as alligator weed and soft rush (*Juncus effusus*).

Much of the southern tract has been converted to improved and semi-improved pasture with bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*). Some of these areas were likely historic bottomland forest and adjacent to wetlands. Aerial photographs over the past two decades show occasional flooding in much of the southern pastures which also have a series of shallow ditches. Wetter portions of the pastures have typical weedy species such as soft rush, alligator weed, big carpetgrass (*Axonopus furcatus*), spadeleaf (*Centella erecta*), Colombian waxweed (*Cuphea carthagenensis*), dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*) and invasive torpedo grass (*Panicum repens*; Florida Invasive Species Council [FISC] Category I).

Current and former planted pine stands make up about 28% of the proposal. On the northern tract, these were planted stands over a more or less native flatwoods groundcover. Recently, all of these pines have been clearcut, leaving a treeless, low expanse of native shrubs that could regenerate into a relatively intact pine flatwoods over time if managed with fire. On the southern tract, all extant and some clearcut stands of planted pines occupy former pastures. These are heavily altered communities and subject to invasion by Chinese tallow tree (*Triadica sebifera*; FISC I). Two clearcut stands on the west side of the southern tract may have more intact groundcover but were not accessible during the site visit.

There are a few areas of successional hardwood forest along boundaries and also adjacent to the Fivemile Creek floodplain on the northern tract. These are mixed stands, often with pines but containing an open to closed canopy or subcanopy of fast-growing hardwoods such as oaks and sweetgum.

Other land uses making up small portions of the proposal include one area of row-crop agriculture on the south tract, a network of unpaved roads and at least two artificial ponds. The southern tract also has a large 2-acre spoil mound surrounded by a borrow area/artificial pond.

Invasive plants were observed primarily in areas of altered landcover on the southern tract. Planted pine stands, in particular, had a high cover of Chinese tallow trees (FISC 1), as well as scattered mimosa (*Albizia julibrissin*; FISC I), and a single observed patch of cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*; FISC I). The large spoil mound is surrounded by a stand of Chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*; FISC II). Wet pastures have large patches of torpedo grass (FISC I). Natural areas on the property have very few invasive plants, such as occasional small patches of Japanese climbing fern (*Lygodium japonicum*; FISC I).

Table 1. Natural communities and landcover types within Florida Forever proposal

Community or Landcover	Acres	Percent of Proposal
bottomland forest	273	20
wet flatwoods	83	6
mesic flatwoods	46	3
basin swamp	44	3
dome swamp	21	2
blackwater stream	2	<1
pasture - improved	271	20
clearcut pine plantation	230	17
successional hydric shrubland/forest	160	12
pine plantation	150	11
agriculture	38	3
road	23	2
pasture - semi-improved	12	1
successional hardwood forest	7	1
clearing/regeneration	3	<1
spoil area	2	<1
artificial pond	2	<1
borrow area	2	<1
Total	1,370	100

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

This summary provides an assessment of fish and wildlife resources on the New River Watershed Florida Forever proposal based on field observations during the June 24, 2026, site visit, and on associated GIS analysis and review of species population and status resources.

Multiple plant communities were observed during the site visit, including basin swamp, bottomland forest, wet flatwoods, floodplain swamp, baygall, dome swamp and successional hydric shrubland. The wet and mesic wooded areas and dome swamps had a relatively good diversity of hardwood tree species, more so on the south tract. This property was logged in the past, including many of the wetland communities. Suitable soils were then converted to slash pine plantation or improved pasture. Both slash pine and longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) were observed. The plantation areas were heavily bedded and appeared to have had heavy herbicide applications. They are mowed (though less frequently than historically), thinned or clear-cut depending on stand conditions. A 60-acre clearcut was observed in the north tract completed earlier this year, and the owners reported at least one additional clearcut is planned for later this year. The owners are reportedly beginning to work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Florida Forest Service to develop management plans for their forest lands, which will include plans for prescribed burns.

Roughly 150 head of cattle graze the southern tract. All of the wetlands embedded in or adjacent to pasture have been impacted from unrestricted cattle access. A high fence runs through this tract, a holdover from when the property was a deer farm. The south tract contained many mesic plant species, such as alligator weed, horsetail paspalum (*Paspalum fluitans*), and a variety of rushes (*Juncus*), which indicate the extent of the river floodplain when not in drought conditions. Invasive Chinese tallow, cogon grass, guinea grass (*Urochloa maxima*), smut grass (*Sporobolus* spp.), and Japanese climbing fern were also observed.

A number of SGCN were observed including wood storks, white ibis (*Eudocimus albus*), northern bobwhites (*Colinus virginianus*), green heron (*Butorides virescens*), and swallow-tailed kites. Additional wildlife species observed included alligators (*Alligator mississippiensis*; Federally Threatened due to Similarity of Appearance), Mississippi kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*), turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*), red-bellied woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*), barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), a couple of white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), and a few common passerines (*Passeriformes*).

The FWC Florida Landscape Assessment Model mean score for the proposal is 5.4 (on a 0–10 increasing value scale). The proposal contains designated FWC Strategic Habitat Conservation Area (SHCA) for two species, 645 acres of Priority 3 SHCA (on a 1-5 scale of decreasing priority) for the swallow-tailed kite and 1,018 acres of Priority 5 SHCA for the Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*). Onsite observations confirmed the existence of habitat for these SHCA species. The entire property is indicated as Rare Fish Imperiled Waters for the ironcolor shiner (*Notropis chalybaeus*; SGCN). Approximately 45% of the property is indicated as Priority 2 or 3 Floodplain Resources (on a 1-6 scale of decreasing priority), and 490 acres of the property (34%) is designated as wetlands by the National Wetlands Inventory. Fivemile Creek and the New River are indicated with potentially suitable habitat for the Federally Endangered oval pigtoe (*Pleurobema pyriforme*) and the Federally Threatened Suwanee moccasinshell (*Medionidus walkeri*). U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service surveys found individuals of these two species in the New River in 2016, including Suwanee

moccasinshells in the portion along the south tract. More recently, FWC trapped the federally Threatened Suwannee alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys suwanniensis*) in the New River.

In summary, the New River Watershed offers conservation value through a less than fee acquisition that protects water resources, prevents future development and preserves wildlife habitats. Implementing prescribed fires will improve the current condition of the pine stands. Replanting clearcuts will prevent habitat degradation, and the condition of resultant habitat would also benefit from the implementation of fire. Wildlife on the southern tract would benefit from removal of the high fence. Development on this tract could have a negative impact on the water quality of the New River, which serves as a critical habitat for federally protected species.

GOALS, MEASURES AND CRITERIA

GOAL A:

ENHANCE THE COORDINATION AND COMPLETION OF LAND ACQUISITION PROJECTS

Measure A1:

The number of acres acquired through the state's land acquisition programs that contribute to the enhancement of essential natural resources, ecosystem service parcels, and connecting linkage corridors as identified and developed by the best available scientific data.

If acquired, all 1,262 acres would contribute to ecosystem service parcels and connecting linkage corridors.

Measure A2:

The number of acres protected through the use of alternatives to fee simple acquisition.

The entire project (1,262 acres) is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition via conservation easement.

GOAL B:

INCREASE THE PROTECTION OF FLORIDA'S BIODIVERSITY AT THE SPECIES, NATURAL COMMUNITY, AND LANDSCAPE LEVELS

Measure B1:

The number of acres acquired of significant Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas.

The SHCA Florida Forever Conservation Needs layer identifies important remaining habitat conservation needs for 62 terrestrial vertebrates on private lands. Priority 1 and 2 represent habitat for species considered imperiled or critically imperiled in Florida. The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation (FFME) table (Appendix B) reports the site contains approximately 1,055 acres (73% of site) of SHCAs within Priority 3 (45%) and Priority 5 (27%).

Measure B2:

The number of acres acquired of highest priority conservation areas for Florida's rarest species.

Habitat conservation priorities for 634 of Florida's rarest species were mapped and divided into six priority classes. The FFME reports the proposed project contains approximately 623 acres (45% of site) of rare species habitat. The habitat is mostly divided between Priority 2 (36% of site), Priority 6 (5%) and Priority 3 (4%), with the remainder in Priorities 1 and 5 (each with less than 1%).

The following table lists the acres of habitat for each species that may be found on the site, based on the FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities. Please note that habitats for these species overlap, so that the sum total of habitat for all species is more than the total acreage of the priority conservation areas. Acreage for aquatic species includes a terrestrial buffer.

Table 2. Rare species habitat based on FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	Acres
<i>Medionidus walkeri</i>	Suwannee moccasinshell	G1	550
<i>Pleurobema pyriforme</i>	oval pigtoe	G2	550
<i>Pustulosa kleiniana</i>	Florida mapleleaf	G2G3	550
<i>Utterbackia peninsularis</i>	peninsular floater	G2G3	7
<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	Florida sandhill crane	G5T2	55
<i>Mycteria americana</i>	wood stork	G4	281

See Appendix D for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

Measure B3:

The number of acres acquired of significant landscapes, landscape linkages, and conservation corridors, giving priority to completing linkages.

The FFME reports approximately 1,312 acres (96%) of the proposed project contribute to protection of ecological greenways, all within Priority 3 areas. Prioritization is based on such factors as importance for wide-ranging species like Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*) and Florida black bear, importance for maintaining a connected reserve network, and riparian corridors.

Measure B4:

The number of acres acquired of under-represented native ecosystems.

The Florida Forever natural community analysis includes only those communities that are under-represented on existing conservation lands. This analysis provides a conservative estimate of the extent of these communities, because it identifies only relatively undisturbed portions of these communities that occur within their historic range. The Florida Forever Measures table lists the acreages of under-represented natural communities found on the site. Based on this analysis, the New River Watershed proposal contains 129 acres of wet/mesic flatwoods (9% of site).

Measure B5:

The number of landscape-sized protection areas of at least 50,000 acres that exhibit a mosaic of predominantly intact or restorable natural communities established through new acquisition projects, or augmentations to previous projects.

The New River Watershed proposal is disjunct from any conservation lands. It would not currently contribute to a contiguous landscape-sized protection area of at least 50,000 acres.

Measure B6:

The percentage increase in the number of occurrences of imperiled species on publicly managed conservation areas.

The Florida mapleleaf, a rare mussel, occurs in the New River and has been documented in the river adjacent to the site. Additional rare invertebrates, including a variety of aquatic insects (e.g., caddisflies, mayflies and stoneflies), may occur in or along the creek. During the site visit, several swallow-tailed kites were observed flying over the site. Multiple species of wading birds may occasionally forage on the property.

The FFME table lists the number of Element Occurrences by Global Rank (G-rank) that are found on the proposal. Note that the number of occurrences does not necessarily match the number of species in the following table because a) some species may have more than one occurrence on the proposal site, or b) some species observed on site do not meet the criteria for addition to the FNAI database at this time. The table below contains species falling into any of these observational categories, species gleaned from other sources (e.g., Florida Breeding Bird Atlas) with different degrees of locational precision, and species reported in the application or during the site visit.

Table 3. Rare plants and animals documented or reported to occur within the proposed project

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	State Rank	Federal Status	State Status
Rare plants documented on site					
none					
Additional rare plants reported on site by applicant					
none					
Rare animals documented on site					
<i>Pustulosa kleiniana</i>	Florida mapleleaf	G2?	S1	N	N
<i>Elanoides forficatus</i>	swallow-tailed kite	G5	S2	N	N
Additional rare animals reported on site by applicant					
none					

See Appendix D for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

GOAL C:

PROTECT, RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE QUALITY OF NATURAL FUNCTIONS OF LAND, WATER, AND WETLAND SYSTEMS OF THE STATE

Measure C1:

The number of acres of publicly-owned land identified as needing restoration; enhancement, and management, acres undergoing restoration or enhancement; acres with restoration activities completed, and acres managed to maintain such restored or enhanced conditions; the number of acres which represent actual or potential imperiled species habitat; the number of acres which are available pursuant to a management plan to restore, enhance, repopulate, and manage imperiled species habitat; and the number of acres of imperiled species habitat managed, restored, and enhanced, repopulated, or acquired.

The property is offered for less-than-fee protection, intended to be utilized in a manner consistent with existing uses. The approximately 273 acres of natural bottomland forest is in good ecological condition, and the remnant 129 acres of flatwoods and 65 acres of swamp are in fair condition. Although lacking a canopy, much of the pine flatwoods could be improved with the application of prescribed fire. Additionally, around 105 acres of clearcut pine plantation on the property may also have the potential for restoration to pine flatwoods.

Measure C3:

The percentage completion of targeted capital improvements in surface water improvement and management plans created under s. 373.453 (2), regional or master stormwater management system plans, or other adopted restoration plans.

There are no Suwannee River Water Management District owned permits, capital improvements in surface water improvement and management plans, regional or master management system plans or adopted restoration plans known at this time for this site.

Measure C4:

The number of acres acquired that protect natural floodplain functions.

The FFME reports approximately 1,019 acres (74%) of the proposed project may contribute to the protection of natural floodplain function. This area is divided between Priority 4 (36% of site), Priority 3 (21%), and Priority 2 (17%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C5:

The number of acres acquired that protect surface waters of the State.

The FFME reports approximately 1,370 acres (100%) of the proposed project could provide protection for those surface waters of the state that currently remain in good condition. This area is divided between Priority 5 (43% of site), Priority 4 (42%) and Priority 2 (15%). These areas represent acreage that contributes to the protection of state-designated Outstanding Florida Waters, springs, rare fish habitat or other surface waters.

Measure C8:

The number of acres of functional wetland systems protected.

The FFME reports approximately 478 acres (35%) of the proposed project would provide protection for functional wetland systems. This area is divided between Priority 2 (16% of site), Priority 3 (13%) and Priority 4 (5%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C11:

The number of acres of public conservation lands in which upland invasive, exotic plants are under maintenance control.

Approximately 50-100 scattered acres are receiving spot treatment for invasive species, as cogongrass and tallow were observed across the site during reconnaissance.

GOAL D:

ENSURE THAT SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES OF WATER ARE AVAILABLE TO MEET THE CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF NATURAL SYSTEMS AND THE CITIZENS OF THE STATE

Measure D1:

The number of acres acquired which provide retention and storage of surface water in naturally occurring storage areas, such as lakes and wetlands, consistent with the maintenance of water resources or water supplies and consistent with district water supply plans.

This site is an extremely large area, approximately 1,262 acres, comprised of multiple parcels in southern and central Union County. The entire site is within the Santa Fe River watershed, more specifically the New River watershed, the Ichetucknee and Devil's Ear Springshed, the Eastern Water Supply Planning Area, and the Santa Fe Basin Management Action Plan. The site does not have any wells or Environmental Resource Permits within its boundaries. However, immediately adjacent to the east of the property, there has been a permit for a bridge replacement by the the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). There are significant natural resources present (wetlands) such that protecting the site can provide additional long-term benefits. Most of the site is within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Zone AE. The site is within the study area of the FEMA flood map revisions that are ongoing. Water improvement projects would only increase the ability of the site to achieve additional storage. An evaluation of the National Wetlands Inventory Map determined that approximately 46% of the site is wetlands. An evaluation of the FEMA flood maps determined that approximately 73% of the site is flood plain. Fivemile Creek flows through the property and the New River is adjacent to the property on the south and east sides.

Measure D3:

The number of acres acquired of groundwater recharge areas critical to springs, sinks, aquifers, other natural systems, or water supply.

The FFME reports approximately 1,370 acres (100%) of the proposed project would provide protection for groundwater recharge areas. This area is divided between Priority 5 (56% of site), Priority 4 (40%), and Priority 3 (4%). Prioritization is based on features that contribute to aquifer vulnerability such as swallets, thickness of the intermediate aquifer confining unit and closed topographical depressions, as well as areas within springshed protection zones and in proximity to public water supply wells.

Table 4. Spatial Analysis for Potential Water Quality Benefits of the New River Watershed

Categories	Scoring Criteria	Project Score
FDEP High Profile Springs (In 1,2,3 or > spring sheds)	12, 24, 36	12
FDEP Select Agricultural Land Use (0-30%, >30-65%, >65%)	4,8,12	8
FDEP Florida Aquifer Vulnerability (FAVA)	4,7,10	7
FDEP Special Nutrient Impaired WBIDs	9	
FDEP Distance to Major Lakes (100, 500, 1000 meters)	8,7,6	
FDEP Springsheds or within 5 miles	10, 7	10
FDEP BMAPs	10	10
FDEP Distance to Major Rivers (100, 500, 1000 meters)	6,5,4	6
Total Possible	101	53

GIS Evaluation score is converted to a 1 to 5 value (low to high)

FINAL DEAR SCORE = 4, medium high water quality protection benefits

GOAL E:

INCREASE NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED PUBLIC RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Measure E2:

The miles of trails that are available for public recreation, giving priority to those that provide significant connections including those that will assist in completing the Florida National Scenic Trail.

The FFME reports that no portions of the land trail priorities and opportunities identified by the Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan (2023 update) come within a quarter mile of the proposal.

GOAL F:

PRESERVE SIGNIFICANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL OR HISTORIC SITES

Measure F1:

The increase in the number of and percentage of historic and archaeological properties listed in the Florida Master Site File or National Register of Historic Places which are protected or preserved for public use.

The New River Watershed Florida Forever proposal contains six archaeological sites listed in the Florida Master Site File.

Measure F2:

The increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in state ownership.

Acquisition of the New River Watershed Florida Forever project would not meet Measure F2, as acquisition would not result in an increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in state ownership.

CULTURAL RESOURCES:

According to the Division of Historical Resource's (DHR) Florida Master Site File, there are six recorded archaeological sites within the boundary of the New River Watershed Florida Forever project. Five of these sites have been identified as precontact lithic scatters of indeterminate age and limited data potential. One site (UN00054 – Canova Howard) has been recorded as a multi-component site with a nineteenth-century homestead sitting on top of an area with evidence of extensive human use dating back at least 6,000 years.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS:

DHR staff observed sites to be in maintenance condition and the probability of additional sites on the project is high. Should any artifacts or other cultural resources be discovered on the property in the future, DHR recommends leaving them in place and contacting DHR's Public Lands Archaeology Program for further evaluation.

GOAL G:

INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF FORESTLAND AVAILABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Measure G1:

The number of acres acquired that are available for sustainable forest management.

This goal is being accomplished in coordination with state and federal programs through the Florida Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service to reforest and sustainably manage the property. The landowner has an active Forest Stewardship Plan along with cost share plans and practices approved for the property to encourage reforestation and employ best management practices.

The FFME reports approximately 517 acres (38% of site) could be available for sustainable forest management, mostly divided between Priority 4 (409 acres), Priority 3 (87 acres) and Priority 5 (20 acres). Prioritization is based on eight criteria set by the Florida Forest Service: whether trees are natural or planted, size of tract, distance to market, average total height that

dominant and codominant pine trees obtain, access/operability, burn frequency, years since last burn and landscape integrity.

Measure G2:

The number of acres of state-owned forestland managed for economic return in accordance with current best management practices.

This property is slated for conservation easement. The current landowner is managing approximately 850 acres using Best Management Practices for economic return.

Measure G4:

The percentage and number of acres identified for restoration restored by reforestation.

Approximately 600 acres can be restored from pastureland to forestland.

CRITERIA

The proposed project meets the following Florida Forever criteria (§ 259.105, F.S.)

- (9)
 - (a) The project meets multiple goals described in subsection (4).
 - (b) The project is part of an ongoing governmental effort to restore, protect, or develop land areas or water resources.
 - (d) The project has significant archaeological or historic value.
 - (f) The project contributes to the solution of water resource problems on a regional basis.
 - (k) The project may be acquired, in whole or in part, using alternatives to fee simple, including but not limited to, tax incentives, mitigation funds, or other revenues, the purchase of development rights, hunting rights, agricultural or silvicultural rights, or mineral rights or obtaining conservation easements or flowage easements.
- (10) The Acquisition and Restoration Council shall give increased priority to:
 - (c) projects that can be acquired in less than fee ownership, such as a permanent conservation easement;
 - (d) projects that contribute to improving the quality and quantity of surface water and groundwater;
 - (e) projects that contribute to improving the water quality and flow of springs

MANAGEMENT

If acquired as a perpetual conservation easement, the primary management responsibility would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management would occur to confirm continued compliance with the conditions of the easement. Monitoring would be coordinated by the Office of Environmental Services within the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (FDEP) Division of State Lands (DSL).

FUNDING SOURCES

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

FUNDING FOR MAPPING, APPRAISAL, NEGOTIATIONS & CLOSING

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

OWNERSHIP PATTERN AND ACQUISITION PLANNING**Title and Legal Access Issues, Jurisdictional and Sovereignty Lands, Legal Issues**

Record of title, a designation of jurisdictional and sovereignty lands and any other legal issues will be determined at the time of acquisition and are not known at this time.

Known Encumbrances (easement, long-term leases, restrictive covenants, etc.)

The easements and encumbrances of record would be determined during the appraisal mapping. A current title commitment would be obtained, or the owner's title insurance policy would be depicted or noted on the appraisal map.

Description and location of hazardous waste sites, dumps, borrow pits

There are no apparent contamination sites within the project based on the application form.

Estimated Cost of Appraisal and Mapping

FDEP Bureau of Appraisal estimates \$10,000 to \$20,000 in appraisal fees.

Acquisition Phases

Subject to funding, the New River Watershed Florida Forever project will be phased based upon price.

GOVERNMENT PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT**Contribution to Recreation and Open Space Needs**

The Project is proposed as a less-than-fee acquisition with the property owners intending to maintain the current use of the site for agricultural uses. Therefore, there is no direct contribution to public recreation. However, the project will contribute to the protection of open space from encroaching development. The project site is adjacent to the New River and associated floodplains thereby expanding protected areas adjacent to environmentally sensitive lands.

Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Spaces

Low Potential: Given the overall potential for subdivision, conversion, and/or development, the property would be at a low risk of losing significant natural areas. The site features several natural communities, including functional wetlands, surface waters, groundwater recharge areas, and natural floodplains. These natural communities provide flood attenuation, aquifer recharge, water quality protection, which contribute to the protection of regional water resources and downstream receiving waters. In addition, the project site features upland and wetland habitats that support a wide range of native wildlife species found in north-central Florida.

Potential for Being Subdivided

Low Potential: The potential for the site to be converted to other uses or subdivided is low. The current land use designations of the project site are primarily intended for less intensive agricultural uses and low density (1 du/5 acres) residential uses. Adjacent land uses for both the North and South Tract include the A-4 and A-3 (1 du/10 acres) designations. Surrounding existing uses are rural in nature with undeveloped lands, farmland, and low-density rural communities. According to the 2000 Decennial Census, the population of Union County in 2000 was 13,442. In 2020, the population was 16,147, representing an increase of approximately 2,705 individuals in a 20-year period. Further, the Union County Comprehensive

Plan designates urban development areas where higher density/intensity of uses are to be directed. The New River Watershed project site lies outside of the urban development area. The Union County Plan provides a robust framework to protect lands outside of the urban development area from conversion to other uses.

Zoning and Densities within the Project Boundaries

The zoning designation is Agriculture-4 (A-4). The intent of this zoning district is to provide for areas primarily consisting of agricultural and residential uses. The permitted uses within the A-4 zoning district include all agricultural activities, processing, storage, and sale of agricultural products and commodities, single-family residential/manufactured homes, plant nurseries and greenhouses, and community residential facilities. Land uses that are allowed as a special use include institutional land uses, recreational activities, and more intensive agricultural uses such as Livestock or poultry slaughterhouses.

Existing Land Uses and Future Land Use Designations

Existing Land Uses: The project area consists of improved pastureland, timberland, and citrus grove orchards, and undeveloped swamp land according to the Union County Property Appraiser's website. The project site is characterized by intact agricultural landscape composed of improved and native pasture, managed timberlands, wetlands, surface waters, and wildlife habitat. The South Tract borders the New River. Improvements on the project site include agricultural infrastructure such as fencing, unimproved ranch roads or trails, water wells, and related facilities necessary to support cattle and silvicultural operations.

Future Land Use Designation: The FLUM category of the project site is Agriculture-4 (A-4). The A-4 FLUM category allows one dwelling unit per 5 acres. The purpose of the RL FLUM category is to provide for areas that are predominantly used for crop cultivation, livestock, specialty farms, dwelling units, and silviculture activities. The AG-4 FLU designation allows Planned Rural Residential Development provided that 80% of the development remains undeveloped and the overall density of 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres is maintained. The AG-4 FLUM category permits a maximum nonresidential intensity of 0.25 Floor Area Ratio. This comes out to a maximum development potential of approximately 294 dwelling units and a nonresidential potential of 15,986,520 square feet.

Development Potential

Low Potential: The development potential of this site is low. The current FLU/Zoning category of the project site allows a relatively low residential density development at 1 du per 5 acres. Lots less than 5 acres and greater than 1 acre are permissible under a Planned Rural Residential Development with more than 8 lots within the A-4 FLU/Zoning category. The Planned Rural Residential requires 80 percent of the development to be maintained as undeveloped area and to maintain an overall density of 1 du per 5 acres. In addition, Planned Rural Residential Development is required to be located outside of wetlands, floodplains, native upland vegetation, and active agricultural areas. The New River Watershed Project site consists of active agricultural areas and floodplains, thus reducing the developable area of the project site.

Transportation Planning Issues

The proposed two separate project sites are located in FDOTs District 2 in Union County, along the Bradford County border. A majority of the roadways near this project are located within rural areas dominated by agricultural and natural habitats. The smaller section of the

project lies 1 mile south of State Road (SR) 238, and a half of a mile north of SR 121. Both SR 238 and SR 121 are designated evacuation routes. The larger section of the project is 2.5 miles east of SR 121 and 2 miles northeast of SR 18. An active Atlantic Coast Bradford rail main line is less than 4 miles to southeast of the properties most southern location. There is also an active Atlantic Coast Spur rail line that runs directly north towards the project site but stops at approximately 2 miles southeast.

FDOT's Shared Use Non-Motorized Trail Network Palatka to Lake City location runs parallel to both project site locations, coming only approximately 2.5 miles in proximity. This stretch of the Shared Use Non-Motorized Trail ranges from active, to programmed and funded to partially funded for pre-construction. There is no surrounding area of both parcels of the project that have Florida Wildlife Corridor, with the closest in proximity over 2 miles north of the most northern parcel.

While FDOT finds no adverse impacts to the proposed project at this time, coordination with FDOT District 2 staff during the acquisition process is recommended to address any transportation system issues that may arise in the future and incorporate them into the management plan as appropriate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Staff in FDEP's DSL and the Florida Natural Areas Inventory determined the final project recommendations. Diana Pepe, Paige Kraker, and Katie Ramirez in DSL's Office of Environmental Services were responsible for the overall coordination of this report, with contributions from the following:

- Division of Historical Resources: Jason O'Donoghue
- Florida Forest Service: Cat Ingram, Koby Stone
- Florida Natural Areas Inventory: Kim Alexander, Gwen Iacona
- Department of Commerce: Yazmin Valdez and David Pullin
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: Joe Vaughn, Dean Cox, Donna Marain
- DEP Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration: Moira Homann and Kenneth Weaver
- Florida Department of Transportation: Emily Rhodes
- Suwannee River Water Management District: Lorna Radcliff

APPENDICES**Appendix A:**

Final FF measures table: Report requirement 259.105 (15)d, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

New River Watershed: Florida Forever Measures Evaluation 20260811

GIS ACRES = 1,370

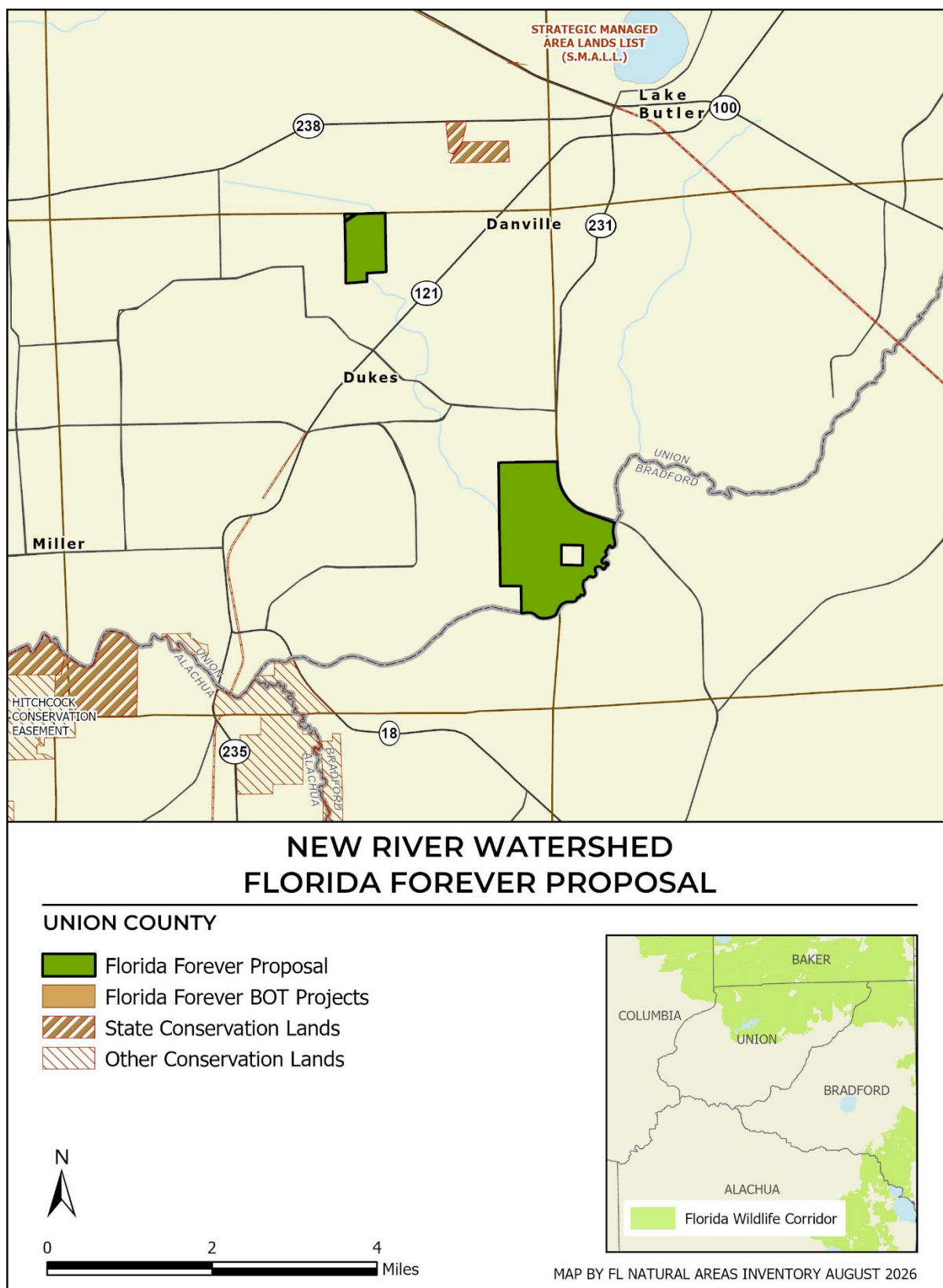
MEASURES	Resource Acres	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	623	45%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	374	27%
Total Acres	997	73%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	7	< 1%
Priority 2	491	36%
Priority 3	53	4%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	2	< 1%
Priority 6	70	5%
Total Acres	623	45%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	1,312	96%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	0	0%
Total Acres	1,312	96%
B4: Under-represented Natural Communities		
Upland Glade (G1)	0	0%
Pine Rockland (G1)	0	0%
Scrub and Scrubby Flatwoods (G2)	0	0%
Rockland Hammock (G2)	0	0%
Dry Prairie (G2)	0	0%
Seepage Slope (G2)	0	0%
Sandhill (G3)	0	0%
Sandhill Upland Lake (G3)	0	0%
Upland Pine (G3)	0	0%
Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4)	129	9%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	0	0%
Total Acres	129	9%
B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species		
G1	0	
G2	1	
G3	0	
G4	0	
G5	0	
Total	1	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	238	17%
Priority 3	291	21%
Priority 4	490	36%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	1,019	74%

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	203	15%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	579	42%
Priority 5	588	43%
Priority 6	0	0%
Priority 7	0	0%
Total Acres	1,370	100%
C7: Fragile Coastal Resources		
Fragile Coastal Uplands	0	0%
Imperiled Coastal Lakes	0	0%
Coastal Wetlands	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
C8: Functional Wetlands		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	235	17%
Priority 3	179	13%
Priority 4	64	5%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	478	35%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	52	4%
Priority 4	547	40%
Priority 5	771	56%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	1,370	100%
E2: Recreational Trails (miles)		
(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)		
Land Trail Priorities	0.0	
Land Trail Opportunities	0.0	
Total Miles	0.0	
F2: Arch. & Historical Sites (numb	5 sites	
G1: Sustainable Forestry		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	87	6%
Priority 4	409	30%
Priority 5	20	1%
Total Acres	517	38%
G3: Forestland for Recharge	27	2%

*Acres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted. This analysis converts site boundary into pixels, which causes slight differences from GIS acres; this effect is most noticeable on small sites.

Appendix B:

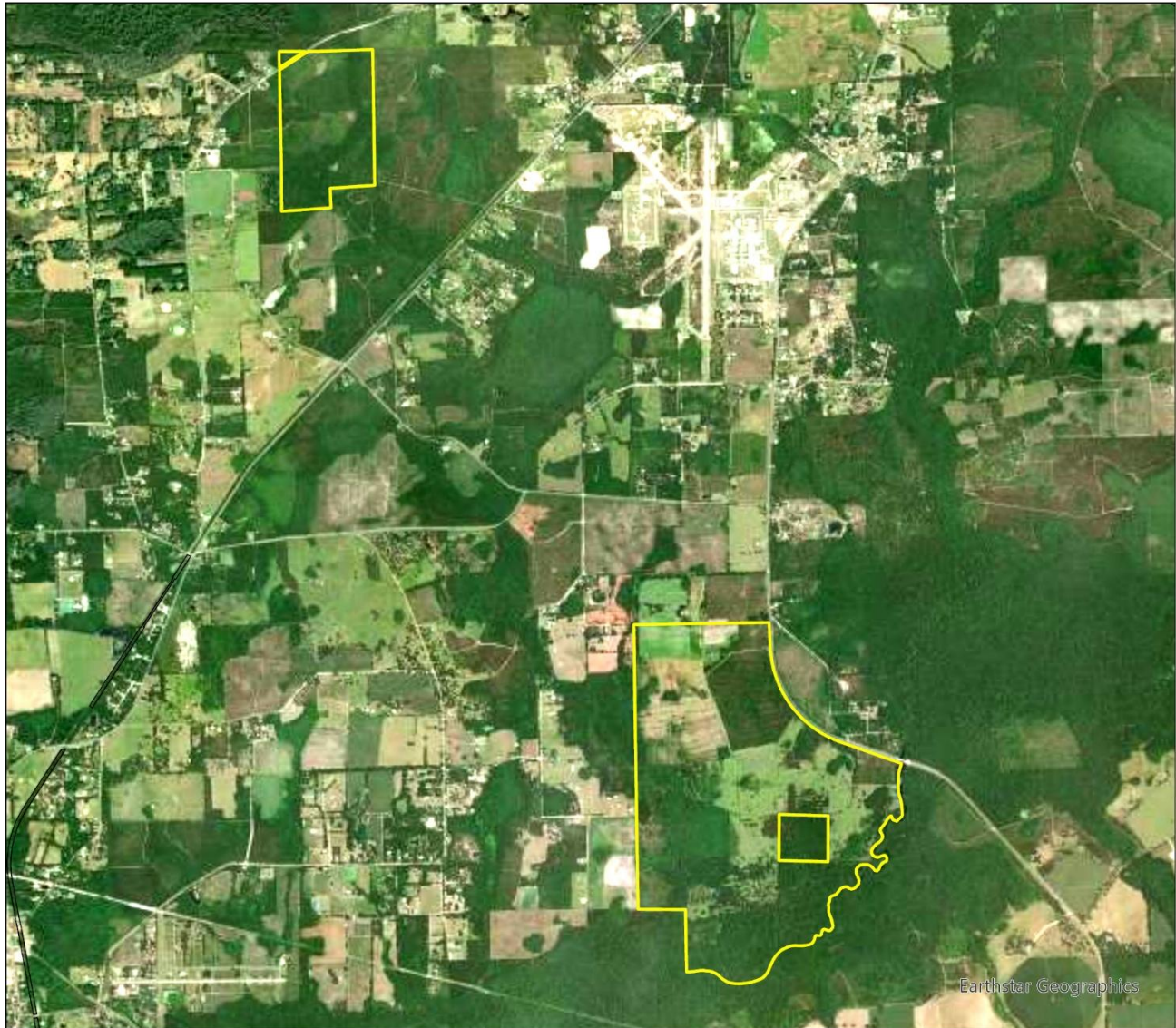
Final FF proposal boundary maps: Report requirement 259.105 (15)k, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

B1: Florida Forever map

B2: Aerial map

NEW RIVER WATERSHED FLORIDA FOREVER PROPOSAL

FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSAL BOUNDARY AS OF AUGUST 2026

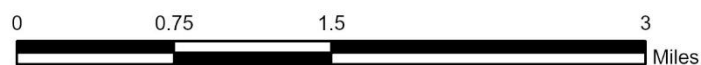


Map Produced by: FL Natural Areas Inventory, N. Pasco, August 2026

Background: ESRI World Imagery



- Florida Forever Proposal Boundary
- Existing State Conservation Lands
- Existing Private Conservation Lands



Appendix C:**PROPERTY ID #'S FOR FINAL RECOMMENDED BOUNDARY**

County	Parcel ID	Owner	Acres	Just (Market) Value	Parcel Designation
Union	0306190000000100	Shirley O. & Canova M. Howard	243.37	\$596,019	Essential
Union	2406190000000100	Shirley O. & Canova M. Howard	432.93	\$710,234	Essential
Union	2406190000000300	Shirley O. & Canova M. Howard	40.15	\$100,000	Essential
Union	2506190000000100	Shirley O. & Canova M. Howard	225.39	\$300,000	Essential
Union	2506190000000200	Shirley O. & Canova M. Howard	119.41	\$180,000	Essential
Union	3006200000000100	Shirley O. & Canova M. Howard	111.95	\$244,500	Essential
Union	3006200000000300	Shirley O. & Canova M. Howard	89.10	\$18,500	Essential
Union	1906200000000400 (Partial)	Shirley O. & Canova M. Howard	107.49	\$218,641	Essential
		TOTAL	1,369.78	\$2,367,894	

Appendix D:*Imperiled Species FNAI Ranking Definitions***FNAI GLOBAL ELEMENT RANK**

- G1** = Critically imperiled globally because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- G2** = Imperiled globally because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- G3** = Either very rare and local throughout its range (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.
- G4** = Apparently secure globally (may be rare in parts of range).
- G5** = Demonstrably secure globally.
- GH** = Of historical occurrence throughout its range, may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).
- GX** = Believed to be extinct throughout range.
- GXC** = Extirpated from the wild but still known from captivity or cultivation.
- G#?** = Tentative rank (e.g., G2?).
- G#G#** = Range of rank; insufficient data to assign specific global rank (e.g., G2G3).
- G#T#** = Rank of a taxonomic subgroup such as a subspecies or variety; the G portion of the rank refers to the entire species and the T portion refers to the specific subgroup; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G3T1).
- G#Q** = Rank of questionable species - ranked as species but questionable whether it is species or subspecies; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G2Q).
- G#T#Q** = Same as above, but validity as subspecies or variety is questioned.
- GU** = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned (e.g., GUT2).
- GNA** = Ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).
- GNR** = Element not yet ranked (temporary).
- GNRTNR** = Neither the element nor the taxonomic subgroup has yet been ranked.

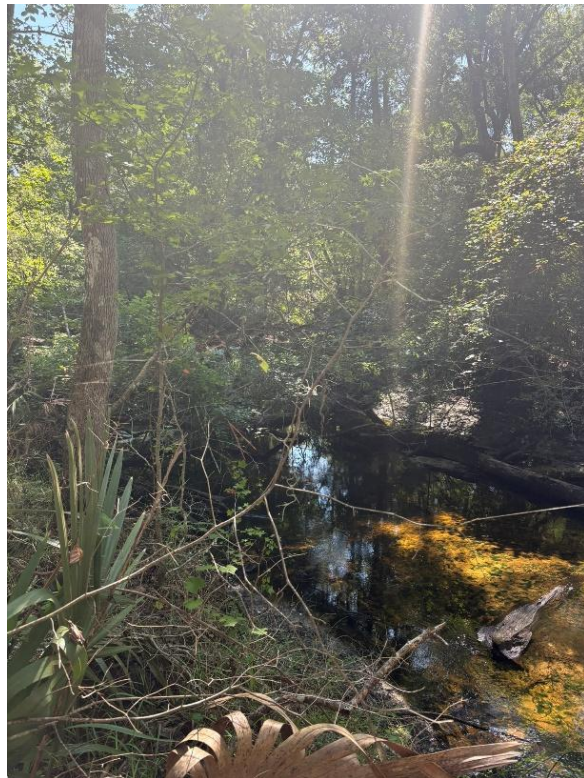
FNAI STATE ELEMENT RANK

- S1** = Critically imperiled in Florida because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- S2** = Imperiled in Florida because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- S3** = Either very rare and local in Florida (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.
- S4** = Apparently secure in Florida (may be rare in parts of range).
- S5** = Demonstrably secure in Florida.
- SH** = Of historical occurrence in Florida, possibly extirpated, but may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).
- SX** = Believed to be extirpated throughout Florida.
- SU** = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned.
- SNA** = State ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).
- SNR** = Element not yet ranked (temporary).

Appendix E:
Site Visit Photos



Cattle in pasture



New River



Fivemile Creek



Archaeological/ historic site



Recently timbered area



Dome swamp

Florida Forever Project Evaluation Report

Oak Creek Flatwoods ***Hardee County***



Acquisition Type: Less-Than-Fee

Acres: 3,196

Just Value: \$24,667,244

Application Date: April 15, 2026

Project Sponsors: Florida Conservation Group

Prepared By:

Division of State Lands

Office of Environmental Services



Submitted to the Acquisition and Restoration Council
October 9, 2026

Executive Summary

The Oak Creek Flatwoods Florida Forever proposal contains 21 parcels owned by the Updike family and Matheny family, totaling approximately 3,196 acres in Hardee County. The property is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition with a tax assessed value of \$24,667,244.

The property is currently a working cattle ranch with some active agriculture, namely citrus. Additionally, the landowners use prescribed fire and recreationally hunt on site. Between the two landowners, there are about 325 head of cattle within the proposal. A little more than half of the proposal remains in natural condition.

Mesic flatwoods on the property were in notably good condition, making up about 25% of the landcover and showing evidence of recent prescribed fire. Southern wiregrass (*Aristida beyrichiana*) dominates the groundcover of the flatwoods, with these areas also containing a high diversity of other groundcover species. Flatwoods within the project provide habitat for a number of rare and imperiled species that have been reported to occur or documented on site; including the burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia floridana*), crested caracara (*Caracara plancus audubonii*), Florida butterfly orchid (*Encyclia tampensis*) and Florida goldenaster (*Chrysopsis floridana*), and the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*).

Oak Creek flows west-northwest through the property, roughly bisecting it. Oak Creek is a tributary of Charlie Creek, which eventually flows to the Peace River. As such, the Oak Creek Flatwoods proposal includes an extensive portion of the Oak Creek floodplain, making up about 13% of the proposal area. The proposal is within the Southwest Florida Water Management District's (SWFWMD) Southern Water Use Caution Area. The landowner reports springs on the property that maintain some flow in Oak Creek, even during drought.

The proposal is in an area largely devoid of conservation lands. Most of the proposal is within Priority 3 of the Florida Wildlife Corridor, which is designed to protect linkage corridors for rare, imperiled and long-ranging species such as the Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*) and Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*). The proposal contains 2,651 acres of Priority 1 Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (SHCA) for the Florida panther, and one of the landowners reported documenting panthers on the property with a camera, including a female with cubs.

There are some historic structures within the proposal area, namely, the remains of a 19th century homesite recorded during the site assessment. This homesite includes a shed, remains of an old house and a corn crib in remarkably intact condition. While this historic site would not meet Measure F because the property is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition, a conservation easement on the proposal would protect the historic structures within the project.

If approved for addition to the 2027 Florida Forever Priority List, the proposal should be added to the Peace River Refuge project in the Less-Than-Fee category. All ±3,196 acres proposed for acquisition are considered essential due to the resources documented on the property (see Appendix C). An interagency team conducted a site visit on July 15, 2026. Information included in this report is a result of the site visit.

PURPOSE FOR ACQUISITION

The Oak Creek Flatwoods would help protect the water quality and quantity of Oak Creek, Charlie Creek and the Peace River as well as well-maintained mesic flatwoods and other natural communities such as scrub and scrubby flatwoods that are becoming increasingly rare throughout Florida. By conserving these valuable habitats the proposal would help protect associated rare and imperiled species asuch as the gopher tortoise and the burrowing owl. The project will support the responsible stewardship of working lands and contribute to conservation in an area of Hardee County largely lacking in conservation lands.

Acquisition of this proposal would meet the following Florida Forever Goals, Criteria and Priorities:

Goal	Criteria		Priority	
A ☒	(a) ☒	(h) ☐	(a) ☐	(h) ☒
B ☒	(b) ☒	(i) ☐	(b) ☐	
C ☒	(c) ☐	(j) ☐	(c) ☒	
D ☒	(d) ☒	(k) ☒	(d) ☒	
E ☐	(e) ☐	(l) ☐	(e) ☐	
F ☐	(f) ☒		(f) ☐	
G ☒	(g) ☒		(g) ☒	
H ☐				
I ☐				

*Projects proposed to be funded pursuant to Section 259.105(3)(b), F.S., must meet at least one of the criteria outlined under Section 259.105(9), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0021, F.A.C., and shall meet at least two of the Florida Forever goals and measures outlined in Section 259.105(4), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0022, F.A.C.

LOCATION AND PROXIMITY TO OTHER MANAGED AREAS

The Oak Creek Flatwoods proposal includes ca. 3,196 acres in southeastern Hardee County. It is a contiguous piece of property proposed for less-than-fee protection via a conservation easement.

The proposal is an irregularly shaped property measuring about 4.5 miles wide east to west that is situated about 6 miles southeast of Zolfo Springs. The proposal lies in an area with limited conservation lands; about 2 miles to the north there is a block of protected lands (four wetlands reserve easements and five Charlie Creek Marsh Rural Lands Protection Easements). About 3.5 miles to the east is the Bentley Rural Lands Protection Easement. Slightly farther east (ca. 6 miles from the proposal) is a north-south corridor consisting of Highlands Hammock State Park and several private lands protected by easement. Unacquired

Florida Forever lands in this corridor (the Heartland Wildlife Corridor) are the closest Florida Forever lands; the Limestone Ranch and Peace River Refuge Florida Forever projects are a similar distance to the west. The property is fronted or crossed by several roads: Sweetwater Road fronts or crosses through the property for a total of ca. 2.5 miles, Harn Road for about 0.9 miles and George Marsh Road for about 0.5 miles; there is also about 0.1 mile of frontage on Johnston Road at the north end of the proposal.

RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

Florida Natural Areas Inventory

This evaluation is based on field observations, as well as information gathered from the proposal, aerial photography, U.S. Geological Survey 7.5' topographic maps, Cooperative Land Cover data (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission [FWC] and Florida Natural Areas Inventory [FNAI], Florida Cooperative Land Cover Map, version 4.0), the Florida Natural Heritage database and other publicly available GIS data sources. A field survey was conducted on July 15, 2026, by the Acquisition and Restoration Council liaison staff, including FNAI biologists Gwen Iacona and Amy Jenkins.

Overall, this proposal lies on an upland terrace with elevations up to about 85 feet above sea level. The property slopes downward towards the Charlie Creek floodplain to the northwest of the proposal. Elevations are also lower (around 45-60') where Oak Creek flows east-west across the approximate center of the property.

Although this property is a working cattle ranch, slightly more than half of the proposal consists of relatively unaltered natural communities. Remnant flatwoods are widespread on the property, with mesic flatwoods occupying about 25% of the acreage, most notably in a large contiguous area in the northeast. The mesic flatwoods are relatively open with characteristically widely scattered longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*), some of which are older flat-topped trees. Slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*) was also noted in the mesic flatwoods but not as the dominant canopy tree. Throughout the property most of the flatwoods that were observed during the site visit were in good condition and had evidence of fairly recent prescribed fire. Shrubs are generally low-statured but variable in height and cover across the site. Shrubs generally consist of saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), coastalplain staggerbush (*Lyonia fruticosa*), fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*), winged sumac (*Rhus copallinum* var. *copallinum*), southern bayberry (*Morella cerifera*), live oak (*Quercus virginiana*), rusty staggerbush (*Lyonia ferruginea*), American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), shiny blueberry (*Vaccinium myrsinites*) and myrtleleaf St. John's wort (*Hypericum myrtifolium*). The groundcover is dominated by southern wiregrass but also contains a high diversity of other species including creeping little bluestem (*Schizachyrium stoloniferum*), bottlebrush threeawn (*Aristida spiciformis* var. *spiciformis*), gallberry (*Ilex glabra*), thin paspalum (*Paspalum setaceum*), sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*), lopsided indiagrass (*Sorghastrum secundum*), Carolina yellow-eyed grass (*Xyris caroliniana*), blue maidencane (*Amphicarpum muehlenbergianum*), Virginia chain fern (*Anchistea virginica*), bluestem (*Andropogon* sp.), witchgrass (*Dichanthelium* sp.), oblongleaf twinflower (*Dyschoriste oblongifolia*), tall elephantsfoot (*Elephantopus elatus*), roundleaf thoroughwort (*Eupatorium rotundifolium*), slender flattop goldenrod (*Euthamia caroliniana*), whitehead bogbutton (*Lachnocaulon anceps*), pinweed (*Lechea* sp.), yellow milkwort (*Polygala rugelii*), tailed bracken (*Pteridium pseudocaudatum*), blackroot (*Pterocaulon pycnostachyum*), queen's delight (*Stillingia sylvatica*) and narrowleaf sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*). For the most part the groundcover is in good condition and consists of desirable species, but in a few areas bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*) is patchily present within the intact

flatwoods, as was the invasive old-world climbing fern (*Lygodium microphyllum*). Vines are only occasional and include muscadine (*Muscadinia rotundifolia*), earleaf greenbriar (*Smilax auriculata*) and yellow jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*).

Scrubby flatwoods are found on higher sand ridges within and adjacent to the mesic flatwoods, and a ~50-acre patch of scrub (about 2% of the site) is present just north of the creek and bisected by Sweetwater Road in the center of the property. The scrub is dominated by a dense stand of tall scrub oaks (*Quercus geminata* and *Quercus myrtifolia*) with scattered open patches of bare white sand. These open patches are important for the large population of the rare Florida goldenaster that is present along the road edges and in the bare patches of this scrub. Other species observed in the scrub are saw palmetto, southern wiregrass, Florida alicia (*Chapmannia floridana*), gopher apple (*Geobalanus oblongifolius*) and wild pennyroyal (*Piloblephis rigida*).

This proposal includes an extensive portion of the Oak Creek floodplain, which bisects the property and flows west-northwest. Oak Creek is a tributary of Charlie Creek, which ultimately drains into the Peace River. The community surrounding the creek comprises approximately 13% of the proposal area and is primarily mesic hammock, with small inclusions of more hydric forest communities. According to the landowner, the entire hammock floods during periods of high water. The hammock is characterized by a closed canopy dominated by live oak. The subcanopy includes cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*), water oak (*Quercus nigra*) and red mulberry (*Morus rubra*). Shrub cover is variable and consists primarily of saw palmetto, American beautyberry and southern bayberry. The herbaceous layer is sparse and includes woodgrass (*Oplismenus setarius*), oldenlandia (*Edrastima uniflora*), smartweed (*Persicaria* sp.), bahiagrass and the invasive old world climbing fern. Common epiphytes include ballmoss (*Tillandsia recurvata*), Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) and the state-listed Florida butterfly orchid. In some mesic hammock stands, particularly those associated with old structures, the invasive Caesar's weed (*Urena lobata*) dominates the understory.

Within the flatwoods (and also in former flatwoods areas now converted to pasture) are scattered depression marshes and dome swamps. The depression marshes are isolated wetlands made up of dense herbaceous species including maidencane (*Hymenachne hemitoma*), blue maidencane, purple bluestem (*Andropogon cretaceus*), rosy camphorweed (*Pluchea baccharis*), combleaf mermaidweed (*Proserpinaca pectinata*), dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*), Tracy's beaksedge (*Rhynchospora tracyi*), slender flattop goldenrod and sand cordgrass (*Spartina bakeri*), with scattered peelbark St. John's wort (*Hypericum fasciculatum*) throughout. Several species of trees and shrubs including pond cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*) and common buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) occur around the perimeter.

Dome swamps have a canopy of pond cypress with a variable subcanopy consisting of dahoon (*Ilex cassine*) and southern bayberry. The understory is made of the aforementioned shrubs plus a variety of lower-statured shrubs and herbs including Virginia chain fern, fetterbush and toothed midsorus fern (*Telmatoblechnum serrulatum*). Vines can be common and include earleaf greenbriar, laurel greenbriar (*Smilax laurifolia*) and eastern poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans* var. *radicans*). Narrow bands of wet prairie occur around the margins of many dome swamps and depression marshes, forming a transitional zone between these wetlands and the adjacent upland flatwoods. These predominantly herbaceous prairies have a dense cover of herbs such as blue maidencane, yellow milkwort, Virginia chain fern, southern wiregrass, spadeleaf (*Centella erecta*), primrosewillow (*Ludwigia* sp.), rosy camphorweed, rosegiant (*Sabatia* sp.), Elliott's yellow-eyed grass (*Xyris elliotii*) and flattened pipewort (*Eriocaulon*

compressum). Shrubs are a minor component of the community and include peelbark St. John's wort, fourpetal St. John's wort (*Hypericum tetrapetalum*), southern bayberry and pond cypress.

Improved pastures, mostly planted with bahiagrass, make up about 1/3 of the site, predominating in the southwestern arm of the property and in a band between the Oak Creek and the northern flatwoods. There are also some areas of abandoned agriculture (mainly citrus), and a few small homesites. In the northeastern side of the property there is an abandoned field that is a combination of native flatwoods species such as southern wiregrass, slender flattop goldenrod, primrosewillow, blackroot and saw palmetto, mixed with approximately 50% cover of bahiagrass.

There are several areas along the southern edge of the hammock along the creek mapped as successional hardwood forest. These are closed-canopied forests and likely were historically wet or mesic flatwoods that have been long fire-excluded. These forests have a semi-closed canopy of water oak, live oak and longleaf pine with several other species in the dense subcanopy and shrub layers such as common persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), water oak, saw palmetto and dahoon. Virginia chain fern, lizard's tail (*Saururus cernuus*), netted chain fern (*Lorinseria areolata*) and fireweed (*Erechtites hieraciifolius*) are among the herbs observed in the successional hardwood forest. Invasives such as old-world climbing fern, Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolia*), and Caesar's weed are common and there is a heavy vine presence, namely muscadine.

Table 1. Natural communities and landcover types within Florida Forever proposal

Community or Landcover	Acres	Percent of Proposal
mesic flatwoods	754	24
mesic hammock	439	14
depression marsh	153	5
baygall	121	4
dome swamp	71	2
scrub	52	2
freshwater forested wetlands	20	1
xeric hammock	19	1
scrubby flatwoods	17	1
wet prairie	11	<1
basin marsh	6	<1
pasture-improved	1,124	35
pasture-semi-improved	190	6
successional hardwood forest	74	2
abandoned field/abandoned pasture	71	2
developed	26	1
road	10	<1
artificial pond	10	<1
clearing/regeneration	6	<1
Total	3,173	100

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

This summary provides an assessment of fish and wildlife resources on the Oak Creek Flatwoods Florida Forever less-than-fee proposal based on field observations during the July 15, 2026, site visit, and on GIS analysis and review of species population and status references.

Pasture is leased on the larger tract for 300 head of cattle. This landowner periodically uses prescribed fire and hunts the land recreationally. In recent years, he has sold parcels to neighboring citrus operations. He reports springs on the property that maintain some flow in Oak Creek, even during drought. While Oak Creek was a few feet wide and only inches deep during the site visit, the landowner had photographs of normal summer conditions when the Creek grows to be a quarter mile wide. The landowner of the smaller tract has 25 head of cattle and manages the property to maintain wildlife habitat on most of the acreage. He uses prescribed fire as a primary land management tool to control successional shrublands and hardwoods, maintain a mosaic of open and wooded areas and promote good habitat for white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*). He reports very good populations of these species, which are lightly hunted recreationally by the family.

This proposal has a variety of good wildlife habitat across both tracts. The dynamic influence of the stream drainages is apparent as their associated woodlands and basins transition to marsh, to shrub and brushlands, and on the smaller tract, to mature mesic flatwoods. This habitat mosaic inherently contains ecotones, and these areas were observed to provide good edge habitat. The mesic hammocks on the smaller tract appeared to have minimal disturbance. They contained cypress and pine and could be considered dome swamps or cypress domes. There were some higher and drier areas dominated by saw palmetto stands on the large west tract and by scrubby oak hammocks on the east tract. Hardwood tree diversity was noted on the large west tract, while the small tract had more pine. Most of the upland habitat on the large tract would improve with additional fire. Native plant species are common in all areas except pasture on both tracts, with a mixture of native and domestic grasses near pasture areas. Limited amounts of invasive cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*), Caesar's weed, and old-world climbing fern were also observed. The owners periodically spray to minimize the presence of these invasives.

A few State Threatened gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) burrows were observed on each tract, and those on the smaller tract appeared to be active. Swallow-tailed kites (*Elanoides forficatus*; state Species of Greatest Conservation Need [SGCN]), southern fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger niger*; SGCN), northern bobwhite quail (*Colinus virginianus*; SGCN), oak toad (*Bufo quercicus*), red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), white-tailed deer and miscellaneous common passerines (*Passeriformes*) were also observed.

In addition to these species, the landowners reported the following species on their tracts: Federally Endangered snail kites (*Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus*), Federally Threatened crested caracara, Federally Threatened eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon couperi*), State Threatened (nesting) burrowing owls (*Athene cunicularia floridana*), red-headed woodpeckers (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*, SGCN), bobcats (*Lynx rufus*), river otters (*Lontra canadensis*), bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), Florida black bears, and turkey. In addition, a few years ago the owner of the smaller east tract captured a Federally Endangered Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*) with cubs on his game camera. More recently, this camera frequently captured a male panther. Unfortunately, a male panther was killed on the nearby highway in this timeframe. Onsite observations confirmed potential habitat for all these species reported by the landowners, although any presence of snail kites is likely short-term and opportunistic. The same may be true for any caracara, considering the relatively low amount of improved pasture observed.

The FWC Florida Landscape Assessment Model mean score for the proposal is 6.5 (on a 0–10 increasing value scale). The proposal contains designated FWC SHCAs for five species with a range of associated conservation priority. This includes 2,651 acres of Priority 1 SHCA (on a 1–5 scale of decreasing priority) for the Florida panther, and 229 acres of Priority 2 SHCA for the short-tailed hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*; SGCN). In addition, this includes Priority 3 SHCA for two SGCN species, 961 acres for the swallow-tailed kite and 52 acres for the Florida mouse (*Podomys floridanus*). Finally, this includes 1,752 acres of Priority 5 SHCA for the Florida black bear. Onsite observations confirmed potential habitat for all these SHCA species.

In summary, the location of this proposal in the Wildlife Corridor, the variety and quantity of good wildlife habitat included, and the land use and land management approach combine to indicate Oak Creek Flatwoods would provide great conservation value as a less than fee acquisition. This acquisition would protect habitat for a relatively large number of high priority imperiled and at-risk species, including the Florida panther, while also protecting intact natural communities and water resources such as surface waters and their floodplains. Active management by the landowners is an encouraging sign that this proposal will continue to provide critical wildlife habitat.

GOALS, MEASURES AND CRITERIA

GOAL A:

ENHANCE THE COORDINATION AND COMPLETION OF LAND ACQUISITION PROJECTS

Measure A1:

The number of acres acquired through the state's land acquisition programs that contribute to the enhancement of essential natural resources, ecosystem service parcels, and connecting linkage corridors as identified and developed by the best available scientific data.

If acquired, all 3,196 acres would contribute to ecosystem service parcels and connecting linkage corridors.

Measure A2:

The number of acres protected through the use of alternatives to fee simple acquisition.

The entire project (3,196 acres) is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition via conservation easement.

GOAL B:

INCREASE THE PROTECTION OF FLORIDA'S BIODIVERSITY AT THE SPECIES, NATURAL COMMUNITY, AND LANDSCAPE LEVELS

Measure B1:

The number of acres acquired of significant Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas.

The SHCA Florida Forever Conservation Needs layer identifies important remaining habitat conservation needs for 62 terrestrial vertebrates on private lands. Priority 1 and 2 represent habitat for species considered imperiled or critically imperiled in Florida. The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation (FFME) table (Appendix B) reports the site contains approximately 2,932 acres (92% of site) of SHCAs. This is primarily within Priority 1 (83% of site) with the remainder in Priority 2 (7%), Priority 5 (2%) and Priority 3 (<1%).

Measure B2:

The number of acres acquired of highest priority conservation areas for Florida's rarest species.

Habitat conservation priorities for 634 of Florida's rarest species were mapped and divided into six priority classes. The FFME reports the proposed project contains approximately 3,016 acres (94% of site) of rare species habitat. The habitat is mostly divided between Priority 4 (36% of site), Priority 5 (27%) and Priority 6 (27%), with the remainder in Priority 3 (3%).

The following table lists the acres of habitat for each species that may be found on the site, based on the FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities. Please note that habitats for these species overlap, so that the sum total of habitat for all species is more than the total acreage of the priority conservation areas. Acreage for aquatic species includes a terrestrial buffer.

Table 2. Rare species habitat based on FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	Acres
<i>Chrysopsis floridana</i>	Florida goldenaster	G3	73
<i>Drymarchon couperi</i>	eastern indigo snake	G3	1,016
<i>Progomphus alachuensis</i>	tawny sanddragon	G3	41
<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	Florida sandhill crane	G5T2	1,830
<i>Caracara plancus</i>	crested caracara	G5	1,934
<i>Mycteria americana</i>	wood stork	G4	218
<i>Neogale frenata peninsulæ</i>	Florida long-tailed weasel	G5T3?	2,425

See Appendix D for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

Measure B3:

The number of acres acquired of significant landscapes, landscape linkages, and conservation corridors, giving priority to completing linkages.

The FFME reports approximately 3,008 acres (94%) of the proposed project contribute to protection of ecological greenways with 91% of the site falling within Priority 3 areas, and 3% in Priority 2. Prioritization is based on such factors as importance for wide-ranging species like Florida panther and Florida black bear, importance for maintaining a connected reserve network and riparian corridors.

Measure B4:

The number of acres acquired of under-represented native ecosystems.

The Florida Forever natural community analysis includes only those communities that are under-represented on existing conservation lands. This analysis provides a conservative estimate of the extent of these communities, because it identifies only relatively undisturbed portions of these communities that occur within their historic range. The FFME table lists the acreages of under-represented natural communities found on the site. Based on this analysis, the Oak Creek Flatwoods proposal contains 754 acres of mesic flatwoods (24% of site) and 69 acres of scrub or scrubby flatwoods (2%).

Measure B5:

The number of landscape-sized protection areas of at least 50,000 acres that exhibit a mosaic of predominantly intact or restorable natural communities established through new acquisition projects, or augmentations to previous projects.

The Oak Creek Flatwoods proposal is disjunct from any conservation lands. It would not currently contribute to a contiguous landscape-sized protection area of at least 50,000 acres.

Measure B6:

The percentage increase in the number of occurrences of imperiled species on publicly managed conservation areas.

Two rare plants were observed on the property during the site visit. A healthy population of Florida goldenaster occurs in the sandy openings and along the roads through the scrub that is bisected by Sweetwater Road. During the site visit, over 300 individuals were counted on the south side of Sweetwater Road. Many of those appeared to be young pre-reproductive plants suggesting the population is healthy and reproducing. Florida butterfly orchid was observed on one live oak in the southeastern portion of the property but there are likely many more individuals in the acres of mesic hammock across the track.

No rare animals were observed during the site visit but plenty of habitat exists for the species reported by the applicant (Table 3). Two other rare animals have been previously documented.

The FFME table lists the number of Element Occurrences by Global Rank (G-rank) that are found on the proposal. Note that the number of occurrences does not necessarily match the number of species in the following table because a) some species may have more than one occurrence on the proposal site, or b) some species observed on site do not meet the criteria for addition to the FNAI database at this time. The table below contains species falling into any of these observational categories, species gleaned from other sources (e.g., Florida Breeding Bird Atlas) with different degrees of locational precision and species reported in the application or during the site visit.

Table 3. Rare plants and animals documented or reported to occur within the proposed project

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	State Rank	Federal Status	State Status
Rare plants documented on site					
<i>Chrysopsis floridana</i>	Florida goldenaster	G3	S3	DL	E
<i>Encyclia tampensis</i>	Florida butterfly orchid	G4 [‡]	S3S4	N	CE
Additional rare plants reported on site by applicant					
none					
Rare animals documented on site					
<i>Hetaerina americana</i>	American rubyspot	G5	S2	N	N
<i>Ursus americanus floridanus</i>	Florida black bear	G5T4	S4	N	N
Additional rare animals reported on site by applicant					
<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>	gopher tortoise	G3	S3	N	LT
<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	Florida sandhill crane	G5T2	S2	N	ST
<i>Caracara plancus</i>	crested caracara	G5	S2	T	FT

See Appendix D for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

[‡]Species not tracked by FNAI

GOAL C:

PROTECT, RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE QUALITY OF NATURAL FUNCTIONS OF LAND, WATER, AND WETLAND SYSTEMS OF THE STATE

Measure C1:

The number of acres of publicly-owned land identified as needing restoration; enhancement, and management, acres undergoing restoration or enhancement; acres with restoration activities completed, and acres managed to maintain such restored or enhanced conditions; the number of acres which represent actual or potential imperiled species habitat; the number of acres which are available pursuant to a management plan to restore, enhance,

repopulate, and manage imperiled species habitat; and the number of acres of imperiled species habitat managed, restored, and enhanced, repopulated, or acquired.

The property, which is divided between two ownerships, is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and is expected to continue being managed in a manner consistent with its current uses. Most of the intact natural communities — including mesic flatwoods, marshes, wet prairie, dome swamp, and scrub — are in good condition. Continued implementation of frequent prescribed fire is recommended in the pyrogenic upland communities, with fires allowed to naturally burn into and extinguish within adjacent wetlands.

The property's pastures, wetlands and hammocks provide habitat and movement corridors for several imperiled species, particularly wildlife such as the crested caracara and Florida black bear. Restoring the existing pastures to native natural communities would be extremely costly and would likely conflict with management objectives focused on maintaining and improving pasture productivity for agricultural use.

Invasive plant management needs appear to be moderate. Cogon grass is currently limited in extent, and one of the landowners reported that aggressive treatments are ongoing. Old-World climbing fern, Brazilian pepper, and Caesar's weed are locally common in more disturbed areas, including successional hardwood forests and mesic hammocks surrounding former homesites. A baseline assessment should be conducted to determine the full extent and distribution of invasive species across the property.

Measure C4:

The number of acres acquired that protect natural floodplain functions.

The FFME reports approximately 1,015 acres (32%) of the proposed project may contribute to the protection of natural floodplain function. This area is mostly divided between Priority 4 (12% of site), Priority 3 (12%) and Priority 5 (7%), with the remainder in Priority 6 (< 1%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C5:

The number of acres acquired that protect surface waters of the State.

The FFME reports approximately 3,192 acres (100%) of the proposed project could provide protection for those surface waters of the State that currently remain in good condition. This area is divided between Priority 5 (38% of site), Priority 6 (26%), Priority 4 (22%) and Priority 3 (14%). These areas represent acreage that contributes to the protection of state-designated Outstanding Florida Waters, springs, rare fish habitat or other surface waters.

Measure C8:

The number of acres of functional wetland systems protected.

The FFME reports approximately 850 acres (27%) of the proposed project would provide protection for functional wetland systems. This area is divided between Priority 4 (12% of site), Priority 3 (10%), Priority 5 (4%) and Priority 6 (< 1%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C11:

The number of acres of public conservation lands in which upland invasive, exotic plants are under maintenance control.

This site is slated for less-than-fee purchase. Approximately 2,000 acres were observed to be in maintenance control during site reconnaissance. Invasive species observed included a few Camphor trees (*Cinnamomum camphora*) in the scrub areas, cogon grass, smut grass

(*Sporobolus spp.*), and Ceasar's weed (*Urena lobata*) in the old agricultural areas and pastures, and water lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*) on Oak Creek.

GOAL D:

ENSURE THAT SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES OF WATER ARE AVAILABLE TO MEET THE CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF NATURAL SYSTEMS AND THE CITIZENS OF THE STATE

Measure D1:

The number of acres acquired which provide retention and storage of surface water in naturally occurring storage areas, such as lakes and wetlands, consistent with the maintenance of water resources or water supplies and consistent with district water supply plans.

The 3,199-acre Oak Creek Flatwoods property is located within the SWFWMD's Heartland Planning Region for water supply and is within the Southern Water Use Caution Area. In addition, this property is near but not within the SWFWMD's proposed less-than-fee acquisition for the Charlie Creek Project.

The SWFWMD's mission is comprised of four main Areas of Responsibility; Water Supply, Water Quality, Natural Systems, and Flood Protection. Each area has a goal; Water Supply: ensure an adequate supply of water to provide for all existing and future reasonable and beneficial uses while protecting and maintaining water resources and related natural systems. Water Quality: protect and improve water quality to sustain the water resources, environment, economy and quality of life. Natural Systems: preserve, protect, and restore natural systems to support their natural hydrologic and ecological functions. Flood Protection: minimize flood damage to protect people, property, infrastructure and investment. This property contributes to all four Areas of Responsibility, Water Quality 76%, Water Supply 31%, Natural Systems 58% and Flood Protection 32%.

Measure D3:

The number of acres acquired of groundwater recharge areas critical to springs, sinks, aquifers, other natural systems, or water supply.

The FFME reports approximately 3,195 acres (100%) of the proposed project would provide protection for groundwater recharge areas. This area is divided between Priority 4 (44% of site), Priority 5 (34%), Priority 3 (18%), Priority 6 (3%) and Priority 2 (1%). Prioritization is based on features that contribute to aquifer vulnerability such as swallets, thickness of the intermediate aquifer confining unit and closed topographical depressions, as well as areas within springshed protection zones and in proximity to public water supply wells.

Table 4. Spatial Analysis for Potential Water Quality Benefits of the Oak Creek Flatwoods

Categories	Scoring Criteria	Project Score
FDEP High Profile Springs (In 1,2,3 or > spring sheds)	12, 24, 36	
FDEP Select Agricultural Land Use (0-30%, >30-65%, >65%)	4,8,12	8
FDEP Florida Aquifer Vulnerability (FAVA)	4,7,10	7
FDEP Special Nutrient Impaired WBIDs	9	9
FDEP Distance to Major Lakes (100, 500, 1000 meters)	8,7,6	7
FDEP Springsheds or within 5 miles	10, 7	
FDEP BMAPs	10	
FDEP Distance to Major Rivers (100, 500, 1000 meters)	6,5,4	
Total Possible	101	31

GIS Evaluation score is converted to a 1 to 5 value (low to high)

FINAL DEAR SCORE = 3, medium water quality protection benefits

GOAL E:

INCREASE NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED PUBLIC RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Measure E1:

The number of acres acquired that are available for natural resource-based public recreation or education.

Zero acres, as this site is slated for conservation easement. However, current landowners are willing to consider hosting Operation Outdoor Freedom events for disabled veterans, administered by the Florida Forest Service.

Measure E2:

The miles of trails that are available for public recreation, giving priority to those that provide significant connections including those that will assist in completing the Florida National Scenic Trail.

The FFME reports that no portions of the land trail priorities and opportunities identified by the Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan (2023 update) come within a quarter mile of the proposal.

GOAL F:

PRESERVE SIGNIFICANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL OR HISTORIC SITES

Measure F1:

The increase in the number of and percentage of historic and archaeological properties listed in the Florida Master Site File or National Register of Historic Places which are protected or preserved for public use.

The Oak Creek Flatwoods Florida Forever proposal contains one archaeological site listed in the Florida Master Site File.

Measure F2:

The increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in state ownership.

Acquisition of the Oak Creek Flatwoods Florida Forever proposal would not meet Measure F2, as it would not result in an increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in *state ownership*.

CULTURAL RESOURCES:

According to the Division of Historical Resource's (DHR) Florida Master Site File, there is one recorded archaeological site within the boundary of the Oak Creek Flatwoods Florida Forever proposal. HR01179 (Oak Creek Flatwoods Homestead) is a newly recorded archaeological site consisting of the remains of an old homestead. Features of the site include an intact corn crib, shed and remains of an old house, each dating to the late nineteenth century. The corn crib is especially in good shape.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS:

DHR recorded HR01179 during the field evaluation and the corn crib, especially, is believed to be a good candidate for preservation treatment. Should any artifacts or other cultural resources be discovered in the future, DHR recommends leaving them in place and contacting DHR's Public Lands Archaeology Program for further evaluation.

GOAL G:

INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF FORESTLAND AVAILABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Measure G1:

The number of acres acquired that are available for sustainable forest management.

As observed during the site visit, the property has much potential for increased forestland available for sustainable management of natural resources. Approximately 900 acres are currently used for cattle leasing and therefore significantly impact any reforestation efforts. The property contains great natural pine regeneration.

The FFME reports approximately 800 acres (25% of the site) could be available for sustainable forest management, mostly divided between Priority 4 (404 acres), Priority 2 (243 acres), and Priority 3 (144 acres). Prioritization is based on eight criteria set by the Florida Forest Service: whether trees are natural or planted, size of tract, distance to market, average total height that dominant and codominant pine trees obtain, access/operability, burn frequency, years since last burn and landscape integrity.

Measure G2:

The number of acres of state-owned forestland managed for economic return in accordance with current best management practices.

This site is slated for less-than-fee purchase. Currently 1,700 acres of onsite productive forestland is manageable for economic return.

Measure G4:

The percentage and number of acres identified for restoration restored by reforestation.

Approximately 1,000 acres of pasture, old groves and sod fields are identified for potential forest restoration which would involve light invasive species work, timber stand improvements and prescribed burns.

CRITERIA

The proposed project meets the following Florida Forever criteria (§ 259.105, F.S.)

- (9) (a) The project meets multiple goals described in subsection (4).
- (b) The project is part of an ongoing governmental effort to restore, protect, or develop land areas or water resources.

- (d) The project has significant archaeological or historic value.
- (f) The project contributes to the solution of water resource problems on a regional basis.
- (g) The project has a significant portion of its land area in imminent danger of development, in imminent danger of losing its significant natural attributes or recreational open space, or in imminent danger of subdivision which would result in multiple ownership and make acquisition of the project costly or less likely to be accomplished.
- (k) The project may be acquired, in whole or in part, using alternatives to fee simple, including but not limited to, tax incentives, mitigation funds, or other revenues, the purchase of development rights, hunting rights, agricultural or silvicultural rights, or mineral rights or obtaining conservation easements or flowage easements.
- (10) The Acquisition and Restoration Council shall give increased priority to:
 - (c) projects that can be acquired in less than fee ownership, such as a permanent conservation easement;
 - (d) projects that contribute to improving the quality and quantity of surface water and groundwater;
 - (g) projects in imminent danger of development, loss of significant natural attributes or recreational open space, or subdivision, which would result in multiple ownership and make acquisition of the project costly or less likely to be accomplished;
 - (h) projects located within the Florida Wildlife Corridor

MANAGEMENT

If acquired as a perpetual conservation easement, the primary management responsibility would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management would occur to confirm continued compliance with the conditions of the easement. Monitoring would be coordinated by the Office of Environmental Services within the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (FDEP) Division of State Lands (DSL).

FUNDING SOURCES

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

FUNDING FOR MAPPING, APPRAISAL, NEGOTIATIONS & CLOSING

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

OWNERSHIP PATTERN AND ACQUISITION PLANNING

Title and Legal Access Issues, Jurisdictional and Sovereignty Lands, Legal Issues

Record of title, a designation of jurisdictional and sovereignty lands and any other legal issues will be determined at the time of acquisition and are not known at this time.

Known Encumbrances (easement, long-term leases, restrictive covenants, etc.)

The easements and encumbrances of record would be determined during the appraisal mapping. A current title commitment would be obtained, or the owner's title insurance policy would be depicted or noted on the appraisal map.

Description and location of hazardous waste sites, dumps, borrow pits

There are no apparent contamination sites within the project based on the application form.

Estimated Cost of Appraisal and Mapping

FDEP Bureau of Appraisal estimates \$10,000 to \$20,000 in appraisal fees.

Acquisition Phases

Subject to funding, the Oak Creek Flatwoods Florida Forever proposal will be phased based upon price.

GOVERNMENT PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT

Contribution to Recreation and Open Space Needs

Oak Creek Flatwoods is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition through a conservation easement and public access would not be permitted on the property. However, the property contributes to open space needs and has numerous public benefits. The ecological benefits of protecting Oak Creek Flatwoods serve the broader public interest in significant ways by safeguarding drinking water quality for downstream Peace River communities, maintaining floodplain storage that reduces flood risk to rural residents and infrastructure, preserving wildlife corridor connectivity through central Hardee County, and sustaining aquifer recharge that supports regional groundwater supplies.

Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Spaces

High Potential: Given the overall potential for subdivision, conversion, and/or development, the property would be at a high risk of losing significant natural attributes. Despite its presently rural setting, the Oak Creek Flatwoods area faces several significant development pressures, including from solar farm development, residential development, and phosphate mining, that could alter the property's ecological and hydrologic values if not addressed through conservation.

If developed, the property would be at a high risk of losing its exceptional water resource protection, ecological and agricultural values. Surface Water Resource Priorities are exceptionally high across the property, with 806.3 acres at Priority 3 and 1,561 acres at Priority 4 – nearly the entire property functioning as a surface water resource for the Peace River System. The property's wetlands provide critical floodplain storage and flood-mitigation value, with a total of 865 acres of priority wetland function. The property's upland flatwoods contribute to groundwater recharge, with 252.9 acres of pinelands within High-Priority Aquifer Recharge Areas. Moreover, the property features open lands, such as 908.1 acres of improved pasture, that are interspersed with native habitats providing foraging opportunities, habitat and migration links for common and imperiled species. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Strategic Conservation Areas analysis identified nearly 83% of the property as Priority 1 (highest) and an additional 228.2 at Priority 2, for a total of 2,948.3 acres designated as strategic habitat. These increasingly rare natural attributes would risk being lost if developed.

Potential for Being Subdivided

High Potential: The potential for subdivision or conversion to other uses is high. The property's proximity to U.S. Highway 17 and the Zolfo Springs-Wauchula corridor makes it accessible for new housing subdivisions or rural estate development. Residential conversion would introduce impervious surfaces, septic discharges, road construction, fencing, light and noise pollution, and fire suppression, all of which would fragment habitat, impair water quality, diminish the property's capacity to support wildlife movement, floodplain storage, and aquifer recharge.

Zoning and Densities within the Project Boundaries

A-1 Agricultural District has the primary purpose of providing areas in Hardee County for the primary practice of agriculture, very low density residential, low intensity commercial services, industrial, public and community services, and recreation and open space land uses. The A-1 district permits various agricultural uses, bed and breakfast lodging, and some light industrial uses, including mining up to five acres and restricts residential development to a maximum of one dwelling unit per five acres and commercial uses to not exceed three acres. Recreation uses are consistent and compatible with the A-1 district when the primary function is public, private, or not-for-profit recreation.

Existing Land Uses and Future Land Use Designations

Existing Land Uses: A majority of the site is undeveloped, with current land uses characterized entirely as Agricultural. The property is predominantly comprised of native plant communities and surrounding working ranchlands. The dominant natural community is approximately 780 acres of mesic pine flatwoods, with 92 acres of mixed hardwood coniferous forest along creek floodplains and wetlands. No active commercial or recreational uses currently occur on the property.

Future Land Use Designation: The Agricultural FLUM category is intended to protect and encourage agricultural activities while providing for low density residential use, and to protect unique habitats and maintain open space. This category typically applies to areas which are predominantly used for the cultivation of crops and livestock including crop land, pastureland, orchards, vineyards, nurseries, ornamental horticulture areas, groves, confined feeding operations, specialty farms, aquaculture operations, beekeeping operations and silviculture areas.

The Hardee County Agricultural FLUM category permits a maximum residential density of one dwelling unit per five gross acres. This comes out to a maximum development potential of approximately 643 dwelling units.

Development Potential

High Potential: The development potential of the property is high. The property faces credible threats from utility-scale solar installations, inland residential expansion from coastal counties, and phosphate mining. Oak Creek Flatwoods protects lands and waters in a county where pressures threaten to convert large tracts of working and natural lands.

Transportation Planning Issues

The proposal is located in the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District 1 in the southeastern portion of Hardee County. A majority of the roadways near this property are located within rural areas dominated by agricultural and natural habitats. State Road (SR) 70 is approximately 13 miles south, SR 35/U.S. Highway 17 is less than 4 miles west of the parcel and an active Atlantic Coast rail main line less than 11 miles directly west are all Strategic Intermodal System facilities but will not have an impact on the roadway or have any plans that could be impacted in the future. SR 70, SR 35/U.S. Highway 17 and State Highway 66, which is located 1 mile north, are all designated evacuation routes.

Almost the entire proposed project and its surrounding area is a Florida Wildlife Corridor. There are two secondary crossings located on SR 66. The crossings are named SR 66 over Charlie Creek and SR 66 over Charlie Creek overflow, and both are bridges that target large

mammals. There is a 4-foot cattle fencing supporting both crossings. There are no currently funded or committed other crossings nearby. To the east of the property there is an unfunded and uncommitted crossing on SR 66 at Highland Hammock State Park. This crossing will likely be a culvert supported with wildlife fencing. Currently, there is a wildlife feasibility study being done for this project (no current design or construction money). This proposed easement will complement connectivity to the wildlife crossings that FDOT has planned; thus, supporting the effectiveness of the wildlife crossings that FDOT is investing in.

While FDOT finds no adverse impacts to the proposed project at this time, coordination with FDOT District 1 staff during the acquisition process is recommended to address any transportation system issues that may arise in the future and incorporate them into the management plan as appropriate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Staff in FDEP's DSL and the Florida Natural Areas Inventory determined the final project recommendations. Diana Pepe and Katie Ramirez in DSL's Office of Environmental Services were responsible for the overall coordination of this report, with contributions from the following:

- Division of Historical Resources: Brandon Ackermann
- Florida Forest Service: Cat Ingram and Richard Larsen
- Florida Natural Areas Inventory: Amy Jenkins and Gwen Iacona
- Department of Commerce: Yazmin Valdez and David Pullin
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: Steve Shattler, Dean Cox, and Donna Marain
- DEP Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration: Moira Homann and Kenneth Weaver
- Florida Department of Transportation: Emily Rhodes
- Southwest Florida Water Management District: Cody Philips

APPENDICES**Appendix A:**

Final FF measures table: Report requirement 259.105 (15)d, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

Oak Creek Flatwoods: Florida Forever Measures Evaluation 20260725

GIS ACRES = 3,195

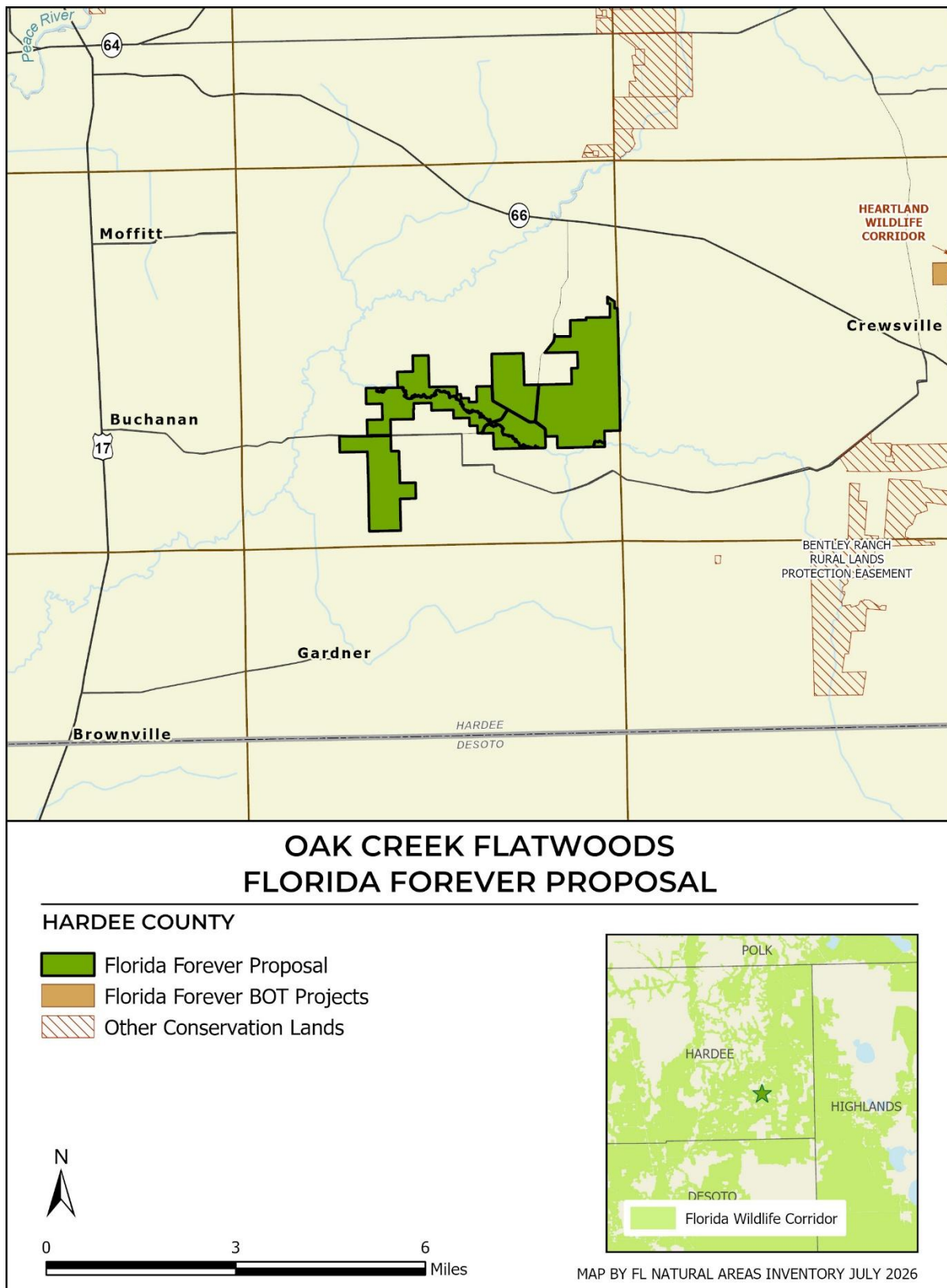
MEASURES	Resource Acres ²	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	2,650	83%
Priority 2	229	7%
Priority 3	3	< 1%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	51	2%
Total Acres	2,932	92%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	105	3%
Priority 4	1,157	36%
Priority 5	878	27%
Priority 6	876	27%
Total Acres	3,016	94%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	98	3%
Priority 3	2,910	91%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	0	0%
Total Acres	3,008	94%
B4: Under-represented Natural Communities		
Upland Glade (G1)	0	0%
Pine Rockland (G1)	0	0%
Scrub and Scrubby Flatwoods (G2)	69	2%
Rockland Hammock (G2)	0	0%
Dry Prairie (G2)	0	0%
Seepage Slope (G2)	0	0%
Sandhill (G3)	0	0%
Sandhill Upland Lake (G3)	0	0%
Upland Pine (G3)	0	0%
Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4)	754	24%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	0	0%
Total Acres	823	26%
B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species		
G1	0	
G2	0	
G3	1	
G4	1	
G5	1	
Total	3	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	387	12%
Priority 4	396	12%
Priority 5	218	7%
Priority 6	15	< 1%
Total Acres	1,015	32%

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres ²	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	432	14%
Priority 4	708	22%
Priority 5	1,220	38%
Priority 6	832	26%
Priority 7	0	0%
Total Acres	3,192	100%
C7: Fragile Coastal Resources		
Fragile Coastal Uplands	0	0%
Imperiled Coastal Lakes	0	0%
Coastal Wetlands	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
C8: Functional Wetlands		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	326	10%
Priority 4	387	12%
Priority 5	134	4%
Priority 6	2	< 1%
Total Acres	850	27%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	36	1%
Priority 3	563	18%
Priority 4	1,404	44%
Priority 5	1,093	34%
Priority 6	100	3%
Total Acres	3,195	100%
E2: Recreational Trails (miles)		
(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)		
Land Trail Priorities	0.0	
Land Trail Opportunities	0.0	
Total Miles	0.0	
F2: Arch. & Historical Sites (number)		
	0 sites	
G1: Sustainable Forestry		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	243	8%
Priority 3	144	5%
Priority 4	404	13%
Priority 5	8	< 1%
Total Acres	800	25%
G3: Forestland for Recharge		
	257	8%

*Acres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted. This analysis converts site boundary into pixels, which causes slight differences from GIS acres; this effect is most noticeable on small sites.

Appendix B:

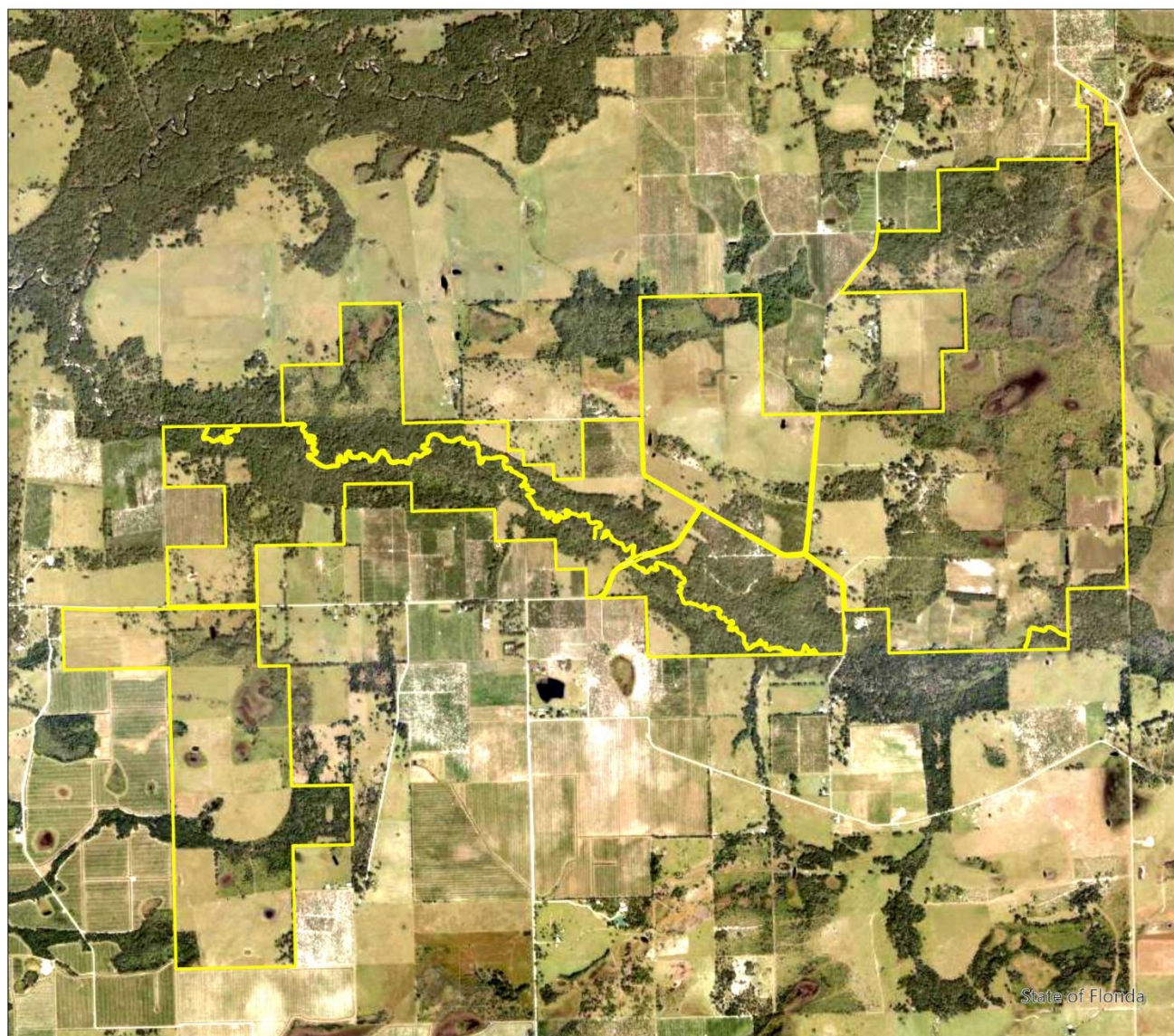
Final FF proposal boundary maps: Report requirement 259.105 (15)k, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

B1: Florida Forever map

B2: Aerial map

OAK CREEK FLATWOODS FLORIDA FOREVER PROPOSAL

FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSAL BOUNDARY AS OF AUGUST 2026



Map Produced by: FL Natural Areas Inventory, N. Pasco, August 2026

Background: ESRI World Imagery



Florida Forever Proposal Boundary



Appendix C:
PROPERTY ID #'S FOR FINAL RECOMMENDED BOUNDARY

County	Parcel ID	Owner	Acres	Just (Market) Value	Parcel Designation
Hardee	2235260000049300000	Charles W. Matheny III	18.91	\$220,653	Essential
Hardee	1335260000031200000	John C. Updike Jr. Family	40.79	\$400,000	Essential
Hardee	1335260000049400000	John C. Updike Jr. Family	274.21	\$2,246,713	Essential
Hardee	14352600000100300000	John C. Updike Jr. Family	10.78	\$161,700	Essential
Hardee	2435260000062500000	John C. Updike Jr. Family	322.22	\$1,780,000	Essential
Hardee	2435260000062600000	John C. Updike Jr. Family	24.16	\$23,750	Essential
Hardee	2435260000093200000	John C. Updike Jr. Family	10.03	\$160,000	Essential
Hardee	2435260000093300000	John C. Updike Jr. Family	30.11	\$315,750	Essential
Hardee	2535260000050200000	John C. Updike Jr. Family	100.64	\$796,667	Essential
Hardee	2535260000050300000	John C. Updike Jr. Family	119.49	\$914,689	Essential
Hardee	2635260000050000000	Mary Jane Matheny	156.08	\$1,313,112	Essential
Hardee	2635260000050100000	Mary Jane Marsh Matheny	136.76	\$926,136	Essential
Hardee	2135260000074500000	Mary Jane Marsh Matheny	356.66	\$2,715,412	Essential
Hardee	2235260000049200000	Mary Jane Marsh Matheny	218.97	\$1,462,782	Essential
Hardee	2335260000099300000	Mary Jane Marsh Matheny	479.51	\$3,809,945	Essential
Hardee	2435260000018100000	Mary Jane Marsh Matheny	160.22	\$1,673,624	Essential
Hardee	2535260000012200000	Mary Jane Marsh Matheny	60.38	\$475,000	Essential
Hardee	2735260000053200000	Mary Jane Marsh Matheny	45.90	\$419,406	Essential
Hardee	2835260000012300000	Mary Jane Marsh Matheny	278.55	\$2,127,875	Essential
Hardee	2935260000050000000	Mary Jane Marsh Matheny	69.73	\$638,930	Essential
Hardee	3335260000025000000	Mary Jane Marsh Matheny	281.87	\$2,085,100	Essential
		TOTAL	3,195.96	\$24,667,244	

Appendix D:

Imperiled Species FNAI Ranking Definitions

FNAI GLOBAL ELEMENT RANK

- G1** = Critically imperiled globally because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- G2** = Imperiled globally because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- G3** = Either very rare and local throughout its range (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.
- G4** = Apparently secure globally (may be rare in parts of range).
- G5** = Demonstrably secure globally.
- GH** = Of historical occurrence throughout its range, may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).
- GX** = Believed to be extinct throughout range.
- GXC** = Extirpated from the wild but still known from captivity or cultivation.
- G#?** = Tentative rank (e.g., G2?).
- G#G#** = Range of rank; insufficient data to assign specific global rank (e.g., G2G3).
- G#T#** = Rank of a taxonomic subgroup such as a subspecies or variety; the G portion of the rank refers to the entire species and the T portion refers to the specific subgroup; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G3T1).
- G#Q** = Rank of questionable species - ranked as species but questionable whether it is species or subspecies; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G2Q).
- G#T#Q** = Same as above, but validity as subspecies or variety is questioned.
- GU** = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned (e.g., GUT2).
- GNA** = Ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).
- GNR** = Element not yet ranked (temporary).
- GNRTNR** = Neither the element nor the taxonomic subgroup has yet been ranked.

FNAI STATE ELEMENT RANK

- S1** = Critically imperiled in Florida because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- S2** = Imperiled in Florida because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- S3** = Either very rare and local in Florida (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.
- S4** = Apparently secure in Florida (may be rare in parts of range).
- S5** = Demonstrably secure in Florida.
- SH** = Of historical occurrence in Florida, possibly extirpated, but may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).
- SX** = Believed to be extirpated throughout Florida.
- SU** = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned.
- SNA** = State ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).
- SNR** = Element not yet ranked (temporary).

Appendix E:
Site Visit Photos



Oak Creek



Historic structure



Cypress dome



Bird nest



Mesic flatwoods



Cypress dome

Florida Forever Project Evaluation Report

Ocklawaha Bufferlands ***Marion County***



Acquisition Type: Less-Than-Fee

Acres: 3,294

Just Value: \$32,793,609

Application Date: April 15, 2026

Project Sponsors: Putnam Land Conservancy

Prepared By:

Division of State Lands

Office of Environmental Services



Submitted to the Acquisition and Restoration Council
October 9, 2026

Executive Summary

The Ocklawaha Bufferlands Florida Forever proposal contains 20 parcels owned by 12 landowners, totaling approximately 3,294 acres in Marion County. The property is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition with a tax assessed value of \$32,793,609.

The proposal is made up of two disjunct tracts approximately 2 miles apart and separated by residential areas. Current uses include silviculture, agriculture and cattle ranching. Pine plantations make up nearly half of the proposal site, with the majority located on the northern tract, including converted areas that were formerly used for citrus production. The pine stands are of varying ages and consist mostly of slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*), but some contain longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*). The southern tract consists mostly of agriculture and pasture, with 62 acres still being used for citrus production.

The most prominent natural community within the proposal boundary is baygall found in low elevation areas associated with Lake Weir on the western edge of the northern tract. The property also consists of 58 acres of sandhill in good condition, despite the lack of prescribed fire in the area, which has led to a dense subcanopy.

The southern tract is adjacent to the Sunnyhill Restoration Area managed by the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) and lies within the Silver Springs Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP). There are several sandhill upland lakes of various sizes on the proposal, including two in the center of the northern tract: Fig Lake (AKA Pecan Lake) and Silver Lake. Additionally, the proposal is dotted with several sinkholes.

Several rare and imperiled species were found on the northern tract during the site visit, including tracks of the Federally Threatened sand skink (*Plestiodon reynoldsi*), burrows of the State Threatened gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*), and scrub stylisma (*Stylisma abdita*), a state listed plant species found in the dry sandy areas that provide habitat for the sand skink. A portion of the proposal is within the Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor, which aims to connect conservation lands from the Ocala National Forest to the Osceola National Forest. In addition to protecting habitat for rare and imperiled species, the corridor provides habitat for long-ranging species such as the Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*). Bear tracks were observed on the northern tract during the site assessment.

The proposal's northern tract includes several historic structures: an 88-year-old cottage on Fig Lake, a 59-year-old cabin on a small pond, and a 77-year-old grove caretaker house. Additionally, there is one recorded archaeological site listed in the Florida Master Site File within the proposal boundary.

If approved for addition to the 2027 Florida Forever Priority List, the proposal should be considered as an addition to the Heather Island/Ocklawaha River project in the Partnerships and Regional Incentives category. All ±3,294 acres proposed for acquisition are considered essential due to the resources documented on the property (see Appendix C). An interagency team conducted a site visit on July 10, 2026. Information in this report is the result of the site visit.

PURPOSE FOR ACQUISITION

If acquired, the Ocklawaha Bufferlands proposal would protect habitat for the Federally Threatened sand skink, as well as for long-ranging species such as the Florida black bear. Protection of this undeveloped project would contribute to the surface water protection of two sandhill upland lakes, as well as the Ocklawaha River, an Outstanding Florida Waterway.

Acquisition of this project would meet the following Florida Forever Goals, Criteria and Priorities:

Goal	Criteria		Priority	
A ☒	(a) ☒	(h) ☐	(a) ☐	(h) ☐
B ☒	(b) ☒	(i) ☐	(b) ☐	
C ☒	(c) ☒	(j) ☐	(c) ☒	
D ☒	(d) ☒	(k) ☒	(d) ☒	
E ☐	(e) ☐	(l) ☐	(e) ☒	
F ☐	(f) ☒		(f) ☐	
G ☒	(g) ☒		(g) ☒	
H ☐				
I ☐				

*Projects proposed to be funded pursuant to Section 259.105(3)(b), F.S., must meet at least one of the criteria outlined under Section 259.105(9), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0021, F.A.C., and shall meet at least two of the Florida Forever goals and measures outlined in Section 259.105(4), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0022, F.A.C.

LOCATION AND PROXIMITY TO OTHER MANAGED AREAS

The Ocklawaha Bufferlands proposal includes ca. 3,294.2 acres at the southern edge of Marion County. It consists of 2 disjunct tracts separated by less than 2 miles. The proposal is proposed by the owners for less-than-fee protection through conservation easements.

The northern tract, known as "Marion Forests," is separated by a narrow fringe (0.3-0.5 miles) of residential development from the east shore of Lake Weir, and is about 2 miles west of the Ocklawaha River. This tract is surrounded by a mix of residential development (Silver Springs Shores) and to a lesser extent, agriculture. There are no adjacent managed areas, although Sunnyhill Restoration Area is only 0.2 miles east at its closest point; Ocklawaha Prairie Restoration Area is less than a mile to the northwest. The west edge of the Marion Forest tract fronts SR-25 (US-441 Alt.) in 3 locations for a total of ca. 1.5 miles. The southern tract, "MacKay Farms" lies on the southern border of Marion County. This tract adjoins the Sunnyhill Restoration Area to the east, with a shared boundary of 1 mile, and also fronts a portion of Sunnyhill Restoration Area to the south. Via Sunnyhill Restoration Area, the two tracts are

connected (or nearly connected) to the Ocala National Forest and a vast area of contiguous managed lands. The nearest unacquired Florida Forever project lands (the Heather Island/Ocklawaha River and Etoniah/Cross Florida Greenway projects) are about 3.3 and 6 miles from the proposal, respectively.

RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

Florida Natural Areas Inventory

This evaluation is based on information gathered from onsite observations, as well as the proposal, aerial photography, US Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5' topographic maps, Cooperative Land Cover data (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission [FWC] and Florida Natural Areas Inventory [FNAI], Florida Cooperative Land Cover Map, version 4.0), the FNAI Natural Heritage database, and other public GIS data. A field survey was conducted on July 10, 2026, by the Acquisition and Restoration Council liaison staff, including FNAI biologists Geoff Parks and Kim Alexander.

The proposal lies near the eastern edge of the Ocala Karst Hills geomorphological province, a region characterized by undulating topography and numerous sinkholes and sinkhole wetlands. Both sites are pockmarked with sandhill upland lakes, the largest of which are Silver Lake and Pecan Lake (both excluded from the proposal boundary) on the Marion Forests tract, and Tigerhead Lake at the northwestern edge of the MacKay Farms tract. Elevations on the proposal rise to ca. 180 feet above sea level on the Marion Forests tract south of Silver Lake, with sinkholes a short distance away dropping as low as 65 feet. Relief on the MacKay Farms tract is similar, with elevations of 160 feet on hilltops and below 75 feet in sinkholes and on the east edge where the terrain begins to slope eastward towards the Ocklawaha River. Only about 11% of the property consists of natural areas; the northern tract is mainly used for pine production, and much of the southern MacKay Farms tract comprises agriculture and pasture. Although much of these properties are relatively dry, baygall is the most extensive natural community on the proposal. Baygall is found in low elevation areas associated with Lake Weir, on the western edge of the Marion Farms tract. This area is reported to have burned over in recent decades and is dominated by loblolly bay (*Gordonia lasianthus*) with an emergent layer of slash pine.

There are several sandhill upland lakes of various sizes on the proposal. These generally lie in deep, steep-sided basins, the upper slopes of which often contain a ring of live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) or sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*) uphill from a zone dominated by dense maidencane (*Hymenachne hematoma*) and a few other species such as Elliott's milkpea (*Galactia elliotii*). The shoreline vegetation is mostly herbaceous, including spadeleaf (*Centella erecta*), umbrellasedge (*Fuirena* sp.), maidencane, peelbark St. John's wort (*Hypericum fasciculatum*), rush (*Juncus* sp.), shrubby primrosewillow (*Ludwigia suffruticosa*), camphorweed (*Pluchea* sp.), pale meadowbeauty (*Rhexia mariana*) and Elliott's yellow-eyed grass (*Xyris elliotii*), with few woody plants except for the occasional red maple (*Acer rubrum*), and sometimes the decaying trunks of fire-killed planted pines. The shallow-water zone of one small pond was observed to be dominated by invasive torpedo grass (*Panicum repens*), whereas another has native floating aquatics including watershield (*Brasenia schreberi*) and white waterlily (*Nymphaea odorata* ssp. *odorata*).

Basin marshes on the site occur in various settings; there is commonly a basin marsh fringe surrounding the larger sandhill upland lakes, and some occur in portions of smaller sinkhole basins or are the main component of somewhat shallow depressions. Shallower portions of

basin marshes include flatsedge (*Cyperus* sp.), pink sundew (*Drosera capillaris*), spikerush (*Eleocharis* sp.), flattened pipewort (*Eriocaulon compressum*), dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*), southern umbrellasedge (*Fuirena scirpoidea*), maidencane (*Hymenachne hemitoma*), myrtleleaf St. John's wort (*Hypericum myrtifolium*), rush (*Juncus* sp.), Carolina redroot (*Lachnanthes caroliniana*), shrubby primrosewillow (*Ludwigia suffruticosa*), pale meadowbeauty (*Rhexia mariana* var. *mariana*) and pitted nutrush (*Scleria muehlenbergii*). Deeper areas that are more often inundated can have broadleaf pondlily (*Nuphar advena*), white waterlily (*Nymphaea odorata* ssp. *odorata*) and bulltongue arrowhead (*Sagittaria lancifolia*). Woody species are often absent or nearly so. They sometimes are localized on the edges or shallow zones of these marshes or may be more widespread in marshes that flood less frequently or for a shorter duration. Woody plants observed in the basin marshes include common buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), dahoon (*Ilex cassine*) and common persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*). Most basin marshes were relatively undisturbed, but one on the MacKay tract showed evidence of damage from trampling by cattle.

A single stand of sandhill makes up about 2% of the site. This community is diverse and in good condition, although the subcanopy and shrub layers are overly dense due to a recent lack of fire. Large, mature longleaf pine dominate the open canopy, and there is a subcanopy of large turkey oaks (*Quercus laevis*), as well as sand pine (*Pinus clausa*), live oak and laurel oak (*Quercus hemisphaerica*). Chapman's oak (*Quercus chapmanii*), bluejack oak (*Quercus incana*), common persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*) are present as small trees, and patches of saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) and woolly pawpaw (*Asimina incana*) are occasional. Portions of this stand have a near-continuous cover of herbaceous plants; southern wiregrass (*Aristida beyrichiana*) is dominant, with a high diversity of other herbs including big threeawn (*Aristida condensata*), pinewoods milkweed (*Asclepias humistrata*), butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), coastalplain chaffhead (*Carphephorus corymbosus*), Florida alicia (*Chapmannia floridana*), goldenaster (*Chrysopsis* sp.), silver croton (*Croton argyranthemus*), tall elephantsfoot (*Elephantopus elatus*), fragrant eryngo (*Eryngium aromaticum*), Elliott's milkpea and other milkpea (*Galactia*) species, garberia (*Garberia heterophylla*), maidencane (*Hymenachne hemitoma*), Feay's palafox (*Palafoxia feayi*), coastalplain palafox (*Palafoxia integrifolia*), scrub goldenaster (*Pityopsis aequilifolia*), snoutbean (*Rhynchosia* sp.), Chapman's goldenrod (*Solidago chapmanii*), pineywoods dropseed (*Sporobolus junceus*), queen's delight (*Stillingia sylvatica*), Florida hoary-pea (*Tephrosia florida*) and goat's rue (*Tephrosia virginiana*). Sandy gaps and areas with more turkey oak litter and less wiregrass have Ware's hairsedge (*Bulbostylis warei*), slenderleaf clammyweed (*Polanisia tenuifolia*), scrub stylisma, deer moss (*Cladonia* sp.) and scurf hoary-pea (*Tephrosia chrysophylla*). Vines are occasional to common and mainly consist of earleaf greenbriar (*Smilax auriculata*) and muscadine (*Muscadinia rotundifolia* var. *rotundifolia*).

This proposal has a few areas of mesic hammock, generally on slopes surrounding sinks. These forests consist of live oak and some laurel oak, along with cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*) in the canopy and subcanopy. A patchy shrub layer of American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) is present. Vines such as muscadine, Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) and greenbriar (*Smilax* sp.) are common, and Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) is abundant on limbs of oaks.

A small area of dense vegetation surrounding one sandhill upland lake superficially resembles successional hardwood forest but is a near-monoculture of invasive plants dominated by camphor tree (*Camphora officinarum*; Florida Invasive Species Council [FISC] Category 1) and Chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*; FISC II).

Pine plantations are the dominant landcover on the proposal, making up nearly half of the site. The majority of the planted pine stands are on the northern tract, with only about 34 acres on the MacKay Farms tract. Pine plantations on this proposal vary in age from newly-planted to mature and are generally well-managed. Most later-stage pine stands observed during the site visit are thinned, open stands of slash pine with a well-developed herbaceous layer; managers of the Marion Forests tract regularly burn the pine plantations, and as a result many stands have a flatwoods-like structure with few large shrubs or hardwood trees. Occasional hardwoods such as eastern wild black cherry (*Prunus serotina* var. *serotina*), sand live oak, winged sumac (*Rhus copallinum* var. *copallinum*), Hercules' club (*Zanthoxylum clava-herculis*) occur as tall shrubs or rarely as subcanopy or canopy trees. Most shrubs are short-statured; Adam's needle (*Yucca filamentosa*) and American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) were observed. Herbaceous plants generally consist of a mix of non-native and native species, such as pineland wild indigo (*Baptisia lecontei*), needleleaf witchgrass (*Dichanthelium aciculare*), maidencane (*Hymenachne hemitoma*), hairy indigo (*Indigofera hirsuta*) and bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*). Vines are common, consisting largely of earleaf greenbrier and other greenbrier (*Smilax*) species, as well as muscadine. Occasionally, invasive camphor tree occurs, and earpod tree (*Enterolobium contortisiliquum*) — including some large specimens — is found in a few locations. Several newly-planted pine stands are located in areas formerly used for citrus production. These generally contain more bahiagrass and some have been invaded by the non-native invasive Guinea grass (*Megathyrsus maximus*). Some young plantations consist of longleaf pine rather than slash pine.

Pastures make up nearly a quarter of the proposal. The majority of the MacKay Farms tract is occupied by pasture; pastures (or pasture-like mowed areas) also occur on the Marion Forests tract surrounding some of the lakes. Improved pastures on this site are mainly a uniform growth of bahiagrass with few other herbs, although during the site visit a small amount of Natal grass (*Melinis repens* ssp. *repens*) was observed in at least one location. There are occasional trees in the improved pasture, including live oak, longleaf pine, turkey oak and sand post oak (*Quercus margaretiae*).

Semi-improved pastures contain remnant native trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants interspersed with the varying amounts of pasture grasses. These occur adjacent to and surrounding the improved pastures on the MacKay Farms tract, and to a small extent on the Marion Forests tract as well. Many of the semi-improved pastures on the site occur in dry areas that were likely formerly sandhill; trees include slash pine and longleaf pine as well as sand live oak and turkey oak. Shrubs in these dry pastures are infrequent. A variety of native herbs are present, including butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), Florida alicia, tread softly (*Cnidioscolus stimulosus*), tall elephantsfoot, Elliott's milkpea, Carolina indigo (*Indigofera caroliniana*), silkgrass (*Pityopsis* sp.), slenderleaf clammyweed (*Polanisia tenuifolia*), Chapman's goldenrod, pineland scalypink (*Stipulicida setacea*) and Florida hoary-pea (*Tephrosia florida*). Semi-improved pastures in more mesic conditions have live oak, cabbage palm, tropical soda apple (*Solanum viarum*, FISC 1) and American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), with Spanish moss commonly draped on the limbs of the oaks.

Successional hardwood forests occur in a few large patches on the Marion Forests tract, and to a limited extent on the northern edge of the MacKay Farms tract. These are forests that develop after the abandonment of cleared areas, or where hardwoods invade and transform formerly fire-dependent communities. Successional hardwood forests on the proposal usually have a closed canopy dominated by sand live oak, laurel oak and/or live oak; sand pine, slash pine or longleaf pine can also be common. Vines, mainly earleaf greenbrier and muscadine, are frequent. Other than oak seedlings and saplings, there are often few other species of shrubs or small trees. Some successional hardwood stands on the site are noteworthy for their diversity—these have developed from relatively undisturbed former sandhills, and many sandhill species persist, albeit at low density. Here, longleaf pine, turkey oak, myrtle oak (*Quercus myrtifolia*) and saw palmetto are occasional. A wide variety of herbs occur, sometimes as patches in canopy gaps and road edges, or scattered sparsely through the stand. Sandhill herbs and small shrubs in these successional hardwood forests include southern wiregrass, slimleaf pawpaw (*Asimina angustifolia*), woolly pawpaw (*Asimina incana*), Florida alicia, needleleaf witchgrass (*Dichanthelium aciculare*), Elliott's milkpea, Florida milkpea (*Galactia floridana*), tailed bracken (*Pteridium pseudocaudatum*) snoutbean (*Rhynchosia* sp.), Chapman's goldenrod, queen's delight (*Stillingia sylvatica*) wavyleaf noseburn (*Tragia urens*) and Darrow's blueberry (*Vaccinium darrowii*). Spanish moss is often common on oaks. Invasive camphor tree was seen in successional hardwood forests on the site.

There are about 102 acres of active agriculture on the MacKay Farms tract. About 62 acres remain in citrus production. About 40 acres of the tract are currently leased as a native tree farm, with rows of in-ground plantings of species such as holly (*Ilex* sp.), southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) and bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*). These are generally surrounded by bahiagrass.

There are a few other altered landcover types that make up a small portion of the proposal. Both tracts have small, developed areas, with residences, hunt cabins and/or agricultural buildings. Unpaved roads provide access to the interior of both tracts. A single small artificial pond was noted on each of the tracts.

A variety of invasive species occur on these properties, although they are generally localized. Camphor tree is widely scattered across both properties, although still at low density in most places. Cogongrass is occasional in pine plantations on the Marion Forests tract, where it is under active treatment. Rose Natal grass occurs sparingly in pine plantations and pastures on the northern tract. Although not listed by FISC, the non-native earpod tree (*Enterolobium contortisiliquum*) is established on the northern tract, including some large, mature trees.

Table 1. Natural communities and landcover types within Florida Forever proposal

Community or Landcover	Acres	Percent of Proposal
baygall	131	4
sandhill upland lake	69	2
basin marsh	61	2
sandhill	58	2
mesic hammock	22	<1
depression marsh	3	<1
xeric hammock	<1	<1
pine plantation	1,575	48
pasture-improved	565	17
successional hardwood forest	455	14

pasture - semi-improved	206	6
agriculture	102	3
developed	24	<1
road	8	<1
invasive exotic monoculture	7	<1
successional hydric shrubland/forest	6	<1
artificial pond	2	<1
Total	3,294	100

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

This summary provides an assessment of fish and wildlife resources on the Ocklawaha Bufferlands Florida Forever less than fee proposal based on field observations during the July 10, 2026, site visit, and on GIS analysis and review of wildlife population and status resources.

The north tract was pasture and citrus that was converted to a timber operation roughly 20 years ago. The predominantly slash pine stands are actively managed with thinning and burning. Although burning can be difficult to complete given the encroaching urban development, native shrubs and herbs were observed in the understory. The north tract is sandy with rolling terrain and largely natural drainage. It contains five lakes, some of which are sandhill or former sandhill lakes, and two are large (i.e., Pecan Lake 230 acres, Silver Lake 180 acres). Planted pine, lakes and rural land use account for approximately 75-80% of north tract acreage. The remaining acreage is largely mixed hardwood-coniferous forest, with some smaller lower areas of marsh and wet forest. The large lakes were quite low but would often provide habitat for wading and water birds, including the State Threatened little blue heron (*Egretta caerulea*).

Plants near some of the lakes, including the large ones, included tree and understory species characteristic of sandhill, such as turkey oak, longleaf pine, wiregrass (*Aristida stricta*) and Indiangrasses, along with some saw palmetto, among other natives. The Federally Endangered herb, clasping warea (*Warea amplexifolia*), and the State Endangered showy daisy, were identified in these areas. Prescribed burning was used in some of these areas, which reduced the presence of successional sand live oaks, shortleaf pines (*Pinus echinata*) and sand pines to a minimum. More burning is required to maintain this habitat. The property owners spray for cogongrass as needed, but report that natal grass is the more common and difficult to manage invasive species in agricultural areas. Some camphor trees were observed near one of the large lakes. The north tract owners indicated that one of their land management goals was to promote healthy white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) populations.

The following wildlife and rare plants were observed on the north tract: tracks of Florida black bear, Federally Threatened sand skink, and State Threatened gopher tortoise were observed near one of the large lakes. Two gopher tortoise burrows were also found, one of which was noticeably active. Various woodpeckers and a red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) were observed. Northern bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*, state Species of Greatest Conservation Need [SGCN]) were heard, along with an abundance of songbirds in the mesic hammock. The owners of both tracts reported regular sightings of all the wildlife species observed, along with State Threatened southeastern American kestrels (*Falco sparverius paulus*), nesting State Threatened sandhill cranes (*Antigone canadensis pratensis*), southern fox squirrels (*Sciurus*

niger shermani, SGCN), nesting bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), white-tailed deer, and turkey. These owners also reported past sightings of the Federally Threatened Eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon couperi*), and their tracts do appear to contain potential habitat for this species. Onsite observations confirmed habitat for all these species reported by the landowners.

The south tract is also sandy, and is primarily pasture, groves and rural, with a substantial amount of surrounding mixed-hardwood coniferous forest/hammock or silvopasture. There are also a few relatively small forested and unforested basin marshes/wetlands that did not appear to be heavily impacted by grazing. There are roughly 250 head of cattle, and the grove land includes a new 50-acre tree farm growing native species such as pine, holly and cypress. The owners are working with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to conduct soil regeneration within the citrus groves. Prescribed fire is used intermittently on the woodland pasture and mixed forested areas, and some native plants were observed in this understory. A gopher tortoise burrow was found on this tract, along with southeastern pocket gopher (*Geomys pinetis pinetis*; SGCN) mounds and scat.

The FWC Florida Landscape Assessment Model mean score for the proposal is 5.6 (on a 0–10 increasing value scale). FWC Strategic Habitat Conservation Area (SHCA) was identified for six species of varying conservation priority. This includes Priority 2 SHCA (on a 1-5 scale of decreasing priority) for two species – 96 acres for the sand skink and 37 acres for the State Threatened striped newt (*Notophthalmus perstriatus*). This also includes Priority 3 SHCA for three species – 752 acres for the swallow-tailed kite (*Elanoides forficatus*; SGCN), 134 acres for the Florida mouse (*Peromyscus floridanus*, SGCN), and 3 acres for the State Threatened Florida burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia floridana*). Finally, this includes over 1,200 acres of Priority 5 SHCA for the Florida black bear. On-site observations confirmed potential habitat for all these SHCA species. One or more of the small lakes on the north tract may be shallow enough for striped newt reproduction.

In summary, the Ocklawaha Bufferlands provides high quality, unique wildlife habitat that supports game species, common wildlife species and State Threatened wildlife like the gopher tortoise, Florida sandhill crane and southeastern American kestrel. If ongoing land management efforts are maintained and improved, this property will continue to provide critical protection for rare plants and imperiled sandhill species, such as the sand skink and possibly the striped newt. The owner's active management is an encouraging sign that the property's overall ecological value will continue to grow.

GOALS, MEASURES AND CRITERIA

GOAL A:

ENHANCE THE COORDINATION AND COMPLETION OF LAND ACQUISITION PROJECTS

Measure A1:

The number of acres acquired through the state's land acquisition programs that contribute to the enhancement of essential natural resources, ecosystem service parcels, and connecting linkage corridors as identified and developed by the best available scientific data.

If acquired, all 3,294 acres would contribute to ecosystem service parcels and connecting linkage corridors.

Measure A2:

The number of acres protected through the use of alternatives to fee simple acquisition.

The entire project (3,294 acres) is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition via conservation easement.

GOAL B:

INCREASE THE PROTECTION OF FLORIDA'S BIODIVERSITY AT THE SPECIES, NATURAL COMMUNITY, AND LANDSCAPE LEVELS

Measure B1:

The number of acres acquired of significant Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas.

The SHCA Florida Forever Conservation Needs layer identifies important remaining habitat conservation needs for 62 terrestrial vertebrates on private lands. Priority 1 and 2 represent habitat for species considered imperiled or critically imperiled in Florida. The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation (FFME) table (Appendix B) reports the site contains approximately 2,090 acres (64% of site) of SHCAs. This area is divided between Priority 5 (34% of site), Priority 3 (23%) and Priority 2 (7%).

Measure B2:

The number of acres acquired of highest priority conservation areas for Florida's rarest species.

Habitat conservation priorities for 634 of Florida's rarest species were mapped and divided into six priority classes. The FFME reports the proposed project contains approximately 2,985 acres (91% of site) of rare species habitat. The habitat is mostly divided between Priority 6 (39% of site), Priority 4 (35%) and Priority 5, with the remainder in Priorities 2 and 3 (3% and < 1%, respectively).

The following table lists the acres of habitat for each species that may be found on the site, based on the FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities. Please note that habitats for these species overlap, so that the sum total of habitat for all species is more than the total acreage of the priority conservation areas. Acreage for aquatic species includes a terrestrial buffer.

Table 2. Rare species habitat based on FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	Acres
<i>Warea amplexifolia</i>	clasping warea	G1	114
<i>Floridobolus orini</i>	Orin's scrub millipede	G1G2	1,161
<i>Pelotrupes youngi</i>	Ocala deepdigger scarab beetle	G2	0
<i>Progomphus alachuensis</i>	tawny sanddragon	G3	44
<i>Plestiodon reynoldsi</i>	sand skink	G3	1,616
<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	Florida sandhill crane	G5T2	605
<i>Mycteria americana</i>	wood stork	G4	38
<i>Rostrhamus sociabilis</i>	snail kite	G4G5	216
<i>Neogale frenata peninsulae</i>	Florida long-tailed weasel	G5T3?	2,895

See Appendix D for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

Measure B3:

The number of acres acquired of significant landscapes, landscape linkages, and conservation corridors, giving priority to completing linkages.

The FFME reports approximately 1,671 acres (51%) of the proposed project contribute to protection of ecological greenways, entirely within Priority 4 areas. Prioritization is based on such factors as importance for wide-ranging species like Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*) and Florida black bear, importance for maintaining a connected reserve network, and riparian corridors.

Measure B4:

The number of acres acquired of under-represented native ecosystems.

The Florida Forever natural community analysis includes only those communities that are under-represented on existing conservation lands. This analysis provides a conservative estimate of the extent of these communities, because it identifies only relatively undisturbed portions of these communities that occur within their historic range. The FFME table lists the acreages of under-represented natural communities found on the site. Based on this analysis, the Ocklawaha Bufferlands proposal contains 69 acres of sandhill upland lake (2% of site) and 58 acres of sandhill (2%).

Measure B5:

The number of landscape-sized protection areas of at least 50,000 acres that exhibit a mosaic of predominantly intact or restorable natural communities established through new acquisition projects, or augmentations to previous projects.

The Ocklawaha Bufferlands proposal connects through Sunnyhill Restoration Area with adjacent conservation lands that include Ocala National Forest, Caravelle Ranch WMA, Tosohatchee WMA, Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway State Recreation and Conservation Area, Blue Cypress Conservation Area, Charles Bronson State Forest and many others. It would contribute to a contiguous landscape-sized protection area of at least 1,155,000 acres.

Measure B6:

The percentage increase in the number of occurrences of imperiled species on publicly managed conservation areas.

Several rare plants and animals have been documented or reported from the site (Table 3), including some seen during the site visit. Species characteristic of sandhill and other xeric communities make up a large proportion of the rare species on the site; some of those were found in remnant sandhill, but some also persisted to some extent in dry pine plantation and dry successional hardwood forest. There are notably large populations of the endemic scrub stylisma (G3, S3, N, E) in dry pine plantations; these and other dry sandy areas also support a population of sand skink (G3, S3, T, FT).

Additional rare species could possibly be documented with additional survey effort; in particular, a known population of clasping warea (G1, S1, E, E) directly adjacent to the site is likely to extend onto the property, although this could not be verified during the site visit.

Rarity rankings listed above are in the following order: FNAI global (G, T) and state (S) ranks, federal status, state status.

Table 3. Rare plants and animals documented or reported to occur within the proposed project

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	State Rank	Federal Status	State Status
Rare plants documented on site					
<i>Garberia heterophylla</i>	Garberia	G4	S4	N	T

<i>Stylisma abdita</i>	scrub stylisma	G3	S3	N	E
Additional rare plants reported by applicant					
none					
Rare animals documented onsite					
<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>	gopher tortoise	G3	S3	N	ST
<i>Plestiodon reynoldsi</i>	sand skink	G3	S3	T	FT
<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	Florida sandhill crane	G5T2	S2	N	ST
<i>Elanoides forficatus</i>	swallow-tailed kite	G5	S2	N	N
<i>Eudocimus albus</i>	white ibis	G5	S4	N	N
<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	glossy ibis	G5	S3	N	N
<i>Ursus americanus floridanus</i>	Florida black bear	G5T4	S4	N	N
Additional rare animals reported on site by applicant					
<i>Crotalus adamanteus</i>	eastern diamondback rattlesnake	G3	S3	UR	N
<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	bald eagle	G5	S3	N	N
<i>Sciurus niger niger</i>	southern fox squirrel	G5T5	S3	N	N

See Appendix D for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

GOAL C:

PROTECT, RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE QUALITY OF NATURAL FUNCTIONS OF LAND, WATER, AND WETLAND SYSTEMS OF THE STATE

Measure C1:

The number of acres of publicly-owned land identified as needing restoration; enhancement, and management, acres undergoing restoration or enhancement; acres with restoration activities completed, and acres managed to maintain such restored or enhanced conditions; the number of acres which represent actual or potential imperiled species habitat; the number of acres which are available pursuant to a management plan to restore, enhance, repopulate, and manage imperiled species habitat; and the number of acres of imperiled species habitat managed, restored, and enhanced, repopulated, or acquired.

The property is offered for less-than-fee acquisition, intended to be utilized in a manner consistent with existing uses. Baygall, sandhill upland lake, basin marsh and mesic hammock on the proposal are in fair to excellent condition and generally require little management. The 58 acres of sandhill are in very good condition but somewhat degraded due to recent fire exclusion; managers of the property indicate that fire has not been attempted recently out of concern for the large longleaf pines. While this is a valid consideration when returning fire to unburned stands, fire is essential to the continued health of this community, and the area should continue to be burned with care. The roughly 2,300 acres of pine plantations, pasture and agriculture would require considerable long-term commitment to restore to native species, and this likely would not be consistent with the intended uses of the land. However, prescribed burning in the pine plantation has undoubtedly benefited both rare and more common native species, and if continued, would ensure that these areas could continue to provide beneficial habitat. In other areas, successional hardwood forest and semi-improved pasture contain significant amounts of native species; the habitat value of these areas could be further enhanced with the regular use of prescribed fire and perhaps careful reduction in mesophytic hardwoods.

Invasive plant control needs of the property are moderate. Cogongrass on the Marion Forests tract is being regularly treated, and control of this species should continue to ensure that it does not degrade the habitat quality of pine plantations and native communities onsite. Control of earpod tree, camphor tree, Guinea grass, and Natal grass would be beneficial. A baseline assessment to determine the full extent of invasive species is warranted if acquisition of an easement occurs.

Measure C3:

The percentage completion of targeted capital improvements in surface water improvement and management plans created under s. 373.453 (2), regional or master stormwater management system plans, or other adopted restoration plans.

The project area is located within the BMAP for Silver Springs, Silver Springs Group, and Upper Silver River. Since 2014, SJRWMD cost-share program has partnered to award over \$26.9 million dollars in funding to improvements within the Silver Springs BMAP zone. This funding has gone toward improvements on 31 different projects focused on agricultural best management practices, wastewater treatment and sewer upgrades, septic-to-sewer conversions, stormwater improvements, other water quality improvements and aquifer recharge. To date, approximately 95% of the awarded project improvements have been completed.

The Silver Springs BMAP includes a land conservation strategy to address water quality within this basin. The BMAP identifies 14 land purchases totaling 48,990 acres. Currently, approximately 134,095 acres of conservation land is protected within the BMAP footprint. Protecting the project area from land use change will help to reduce future water quality impacts to Silver Springs, the Upper Floridan Aquifer and Upper Silver River. Protection of land within the project area will also contribute to sustaining aquifer recharge capacity in this region.

Given the significance of this area to regional surface and groundwater resources, the following terms should be pursued by the State when negotiating acquisition within the project area: enroll all agricultural and silvicultural operations in applicable Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Best Management Practices; limit construction of impervious surfaces; prohibit ditching or drainage of wetlands or uplands to divert water off property; limit harvest of trees in forested wetlands; require invasive species management;

prohibit introduction of invasive species; prohibit supplemental irrigation of cattle pastures; prohibit application of biosolids (Class B, compost or amendments that contain any biosolid components); use wildlife friendly fences; prohibit consumptive use of water for export off property (wellfields, bottling, etc.).

Measure C4:

The number of acres acquired that protect natural floodplain functions.

The FFME reports approximately 553 acres (17%) of the proposed project may contribute to the protection of natural floodplain function. This area is mostly divided between Priority 4 (11% of site) and Priority 3 (5%), with the remainder in Priorities 2 and 5 (each with < 1%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C5:

The number of acres acquired that protect surface waters of the State.

The FFME reports approximately 3,289 acres (100%) of the proposed project could provide protection for those surface waters of the State that currently remain in good condition. This area is divided between Priority 7 (56% of site), Priority 6 (38%), Priority 4 (4%) and Priority 5 (2%). These areas represent acreage that contributes to the protection of state-designated Outstanding Florida Waters, springs, rare fish habitat or other surface waters.

Measure C8:

The number of acres of functional wetland systems protected.

The FFME reports approximately 201 acres (6%) of the proposed project would provide protection for functional wetland systems. This area is divided between Priority 4 (4% of site) and Priority 3 (2%), with the remainder in Priorities 2 and 5 (each with < 1%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C11:

The number of acres of public conservation lands in which upland invasive, exotic plants are under maintenance control.

Across the site, approximately 3,000 acres were observed as under treatment for invasive, exotic plants. Overall, both properties had signs of invasive species inhabiting both forested areas and open pasture areas. Although invasives were found on both properties, the overall prevalence was low. Most of the northern tract was observed to be under invasive species management. Comparatively, far less active invasive species management was observed on the southern tract and monitoring and treatment should likely be increased.

GOAL D:

ENSURE THAT SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES OF WATER ARE AVAILABLE TO MEET THE CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF NATURAL SYSTEMS AND THE CITIZENS OF THE STATE

Measure D1:

The number of acres acquired which provide retention and storage of surface water in naturally occurring storage areas, such as lakes and wetlands, consistent with the maintenance of water resources or water supplies and consistent with district water supply plans.

The project area lies within the SJRWMD's Central Springs/East Coast Regional Water Supply Plan region. Based on SJRWMD wetland vegetation coverage GIS data, approximately 619 acres of naturally occurring storage areas, including lakes and freshwater wetlands are included in the project area. These retention and storage areas contribute to the maintenance of water resources and water supply within the Silver Springs springshed and the Ocklawaha River watershed. Additionally, approximately 2,600 acres—more than 70%—of the project area lies within areas identified by the SJRWMD as exhibiting high Upper Floridan Aquifer recharge.

Measure D2:

The quantity of water made available through the water resource development component of a district water supply plan for which a water management district is responsible.

The Central Springs/East Coast Regional Water Supply Plan identifies a total of 12 water resource development project options. The listed project options have an estimated total water supply benefit of 59 million gallons per day. Notably, aquifer recharge projects contribute significantly to the overall benefit, accounting for 21.6 million gallons per day. None of the currently identified project options fall within the project area.

Measure D3:

The number of acres acquired of groundwater recharge areas critical to springs, sinks, aquifers, other natural systems, or water supply.

The FFME reports approximately 3,291 acres (100%) of the proposed project would provide protection for groundwater recharge areas. This area is divided between Priority 3 (35% of site), Priority 1 (20%), Priority 2 (19%), Priority 4 (19%) and Priority 5 (7%). Prioritization is based on features that contribute to aquifer vulnerability such as swallets, thickness of the intermediate aquifer confining unit and closed topographical depressions, as well as areas within springshed protection zones and in proximity to public water supply wells.

Table 4. Spatial Analysis for Potential Water Quality Benefits of the Ocklawaha Bufferlands

Categories	Scoring Criteria	Project Score
FDEP High Profile Springs (In 1,2,3 or > spring sheds)	12, 24, 36	12
FDEP Select Agricultural Land Use (0-30%, >30-65%, >65%)	4,8,12	8
FDEP Florida Aquifer Vulnerability (FAVA)	4,7,10	10
FDEP Special Nutrient Impaired WBIDs	9	
FDEP Distance to Major Lakes (100, 500, 1000 meters)	8,7,6	8
FDEP Springsheds or within 5 miles	10, 7	10
FDEP BMAPs	10	10
FDEP Distance to Major Rivers (100, 500, 1000 meters)	6,5,4	5
Total Possible	101	63

GIS Evaluation score is converted to a 1 to 5 value (low to high)

FINAL DEAR SCORE = 5, high water quality protection benefits

GOAL E:

INCREASE NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED PUBLIC RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Measure E2:

The miles of trails that are available for public recreation, giving priority to those that provide significant connections including those that will assist in completing the Florida National Scenic Trail.

The FFME reports that no portions of the land trail priorities and opportunities identified by the Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan (2023 update) come within a quarter mile of the proposal.

GOAL F:

PRESERVE SIGNIFICANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL OR HISTORIC SITES

Measure F1:

The increase in the number of and percentage of historic and archaeological properties listed in the Florida Master Site File or National Register of Historic Places which are protected or preserved for public use.

The Ocklawaha Bufferlands Florida Forever proposal contains one archaeological site listed in the Florida Master Site File.

Measure F2:

The increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in state ownership.

Acquisition of the Ocklawaha Bufferlands Florida Forever proposal would not meet Measure F2, as it would not result in an increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in state ownership.

CULTURAL RESOURCES:

According to the Division of Historical Resource's (DHR) Florida Master Site File, there is one recorded archaeological site within the boundary of the Ocklawaha Bufferlands Florida Forever proposal. MR01004 (Silver Lake South) is an undated lithic scatter recorded along the south shore of Silver Lake.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS:

DHR staff observed MR01004 in maintenance condition and noted that the potential for unrecorded resources remains high. Should any artifacts or other cultural resources be discovered in the future, DHR recommends leaving them in place and contacting DHR's Public Lands Archaeology Program for further evaluation.

GOAL G:

INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF FORESTLAND AVAILABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Measure G1:

The number of acres acquired that are available for sustainable forest management.

The current landowner manages for timber production, cattle grazing, citrus production, and wildlife habitat. The landowner's overall objective is to preserve the current land uses as they stand today. Approximately 2,014 acres or 70% of the site was observed during site reconnaissance as being managed for timber production on the northern tract. A much smaller percentage, approximately 33 acres, was observed as currently managed for timber on the southern tract. Timber production is occurring on approximately 2,044 acres across the project site.

The FFME reports approximately 1,384 acres (42% of site) could be available for sustainable forest management, divided between Priority 5 (1,107 acres), Priority 4 (272 acres) and Priority 3 (4 acres). Prioritization is based on eight criteria set by the Florida Forest Service: whether trees are natural or planted, size of tract, distance to market, average total height that

dominant and codominant pine trees obtain, access/operability, burn frequency, years since last burn and landscape integrity.

Measure G4:

The percentage and number of acres identified for restoration restored by reforestation.

Approximately 300 acres of citrus groves were converted to planted slash pine on the northern tract in recent years. The current landowner's objective is to keep the various land uses as is on the property. Therefore, there is no current goal to restore to native ecosystem via reforestation on any other areas that are not already forested onsite.

CRITERIA

The proposed project meets the following Florida Forever criteria (§ 259.105, F.S.)

- (9)
 - (a) The project meets multiple goals described in subsection (4).
 - (b) The project is part of an ongoing governmental effort to restore, protect, or develop land areas or water resources.
 - (c) The project enhances or facilitates management of properties already under public ownership.
 - (d) The project has significant archaeological or historic value.
 - (f) The project contributes to the solution of water resource problems on a regional basis.
 - (g) The project has a significant portion of its land area in imminent danger of development, in imminent danger of losing its significant natural attributes or recreational open space, or in imminent danger of subdivision which would result in multiple ownership and make acquisition of the project costly or less likely to be accomplished.
 - (k) The project may be acquired, in whole or in part, using alternatives to fee simple, including but not limited to, tax incentives, mitigation funds, or other revenues, the purchase of development rights, hunting rights, agricultural or silvicultural rights, or mineral rights or obtaining conservation easements or flowage easements.
- (10) The Acquisition and Restoration Council shall give increased priority to:
 - (c) projects that can be acquired in less than fee ownership, such as a permanent conservation easement;
 - (d) projects that contribute to improving the quality and quantity of surface water and groundwater;
 - (e) projects that contribute to improving the water quality and flow of springs

MANAGEMENT

If acquired as a perpetual conservation easement, the primary management responsibility would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management would occur to confirm continued compliance with the conditions of the easement. Monitoring would be coordinated by the Office of Environmental Services within the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (FDEP) Division of State Lands (DSL).

FUNDING SOURCES

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

FUNDING FOR MAPPING, APPRAISAL, NEGOTIATIONS & CLOSING

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

OWNERSHIP PATTERN AND ACQUISITION PLANNING**Title and Legal Access Issues, Jurisdictional and Sovereignty Lands, Legal Issues**

Record of title, a designation of jurisdictional and sovereignty lands and any other legal issues will be determined at the time of acquisition and are not known at this time.

Known Encumbrances (easement, long-term leases, restrictive covenants, etc.)

The easements and encumbrances of record would be determined during the appraisal mapping. A current title commitment would be obtained, or the owner's title insurance policy would be depicted or noted on the appraisal map.

Description and location of hazardous waste sites, dumps, borrow pits

There are no apparent contamination sites within the project based on the application form.

Estimated Cost of Appraisal and Mapping

FDEP of Bureau of Appraisal estimates \$10,000 to \$20,000 in appraisal fees.

Acquisition Phases

Subject to finding, the Ocklawaha Bufferlands Florida Forever project will be phased based upon price.

GOVERNMENT PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT**Contribution to Recreation and Open Space Needs**

The Project is proposed as a less-than-fee acquisition with the property owners intending to maintain the current use of the site for grazing, timber production, and agricultural uses. Therefore, there is no direct contribution to public recreation. However, the project will contribute to the protection of open space from encroaching development. The project site is to the west of the Ocklawaha River and other protected lands such as the Sunnyhill Restoration Area and the Ocala National Forest thereby expanding protected lands adjacent to environmentally sensitive lands.

Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Spaces

High Potential: Given the overall potential for subdivision, conversion, and/or development, the property would be at a high risk of losing significant natural areas. The project site features several natural communities, including natural sandhill, scrub, planted pine, mixed pine hardwood, and forested swamp habitat. In total, the project area includes approximately 3,650 acres of open space ranging from undeveloped land to lands utilized for agriculture and silviculture production. The Ocklawaha Bufferlands also includes lands that are vital habitat for many federally and state listed species such as the gopher tortoise, Eastern indigo snake, Sherman's fox squirrel, and the sand sink. The improved pastureland and orchard groves on the project site also provide open space for imperiled species. Further, the project site is a priority area for aquifer recharge potential, with much of the site consisting of well-drained sandy soils thus promoting the protection of groundwater resources.

Potential for Being Subdivided

High Potential: The potential for the site to be converted to other uses or subdivided is high. The current land use designations of the project site are primarily intended for less intensive agricultural uses and low density (1 du/10 acres to 1 du/3.5 acres) residential uses. However, the Marion Forest Tract abuts more intensive FLU designation such as Medium Density (4

du/acre) and High Density (8 du/acre) Residential, which may provide a basis for rezoning or subdividing the Marion Forest Tract site to a more intensive land use category. The MacKay Farms Tract is adjacent to lands with the RL and Preservation FLU designation, however there are hamlet-style (1 du/3.5 acres) developments to the east and northeast of the MacKay Farms tract. In addition, existing mine operations are located just north of the MacKay Farms Tract. A visual analysis utilizing Google Earth's Historical Imagery function indicates that development over the last 20 years in southern Marion County tends to be located south and west of U.S. 441 and U.S. 301.

Zoning and Densities within the Project Boundaries

The zoning designation is General Agricultural (A-1), which allows one dwelling unit per 10 acres. The intent of the zoning district is to preserve agriculture as the primary land use. The permitted uses within the A-1 zoning district include agricultural uses, recreational uses, single-family residential/manufactured homes, and veterinary clinics. Land uses that are allowed as a special use include institutional land uses such as private airport facilities, houses of worship, cemeteries, and public/private schools. Other special land uses within the A-1 zoning district include landfills, motorized vehicle racetracks, feedlots, kennels, dude ranches and sprayfields. There is no establish Floor Area Ratio for the A-1 zoning district.

Existing Land Uses and Future Land Use Designations

Existing Land Uses: The project area consists of grazing land, timberland, and citrus grove orchards, according to the Marion County Property Appraiser's website. The Marion Forest Tract is characterized by a mosaic of pine plantations, natural hardwood-pine hammocks, bay-pine swamps, and grazing fields. Pecan and Silver Lakes are prominent bodies of water on this tract. The Marion Forest Tract includes several structures including historic (older than 50 years) residential structures and agricultural accessory structures. The MacKay Farms Tract includes citrus groves, cattle grazing lands, forestlands and small sandhill lakes. The MacKay Farms Tract includes a residential structure.

Future Land Use Designation: The FLUM category of the project site is Rural Lands (RL). The purpose of the RL FLUM category is to provide for areas that are primarily agricultural with associated housing related to farms and agricultural-related commercial and industrial uses. The RL FLU designation allows one dwelling unit per 10 acres. Cluster Development is permissible at 1 dwelling unit per seven acres and hamlet-style developments are permissible and one dwelling unit per five acres and one dwelling unit per 3.5 acres if permanent open space delineated as a separate tract from the individual developable parcels is provided by the developer. Thereby, the maximum permitted residential development in the RL FLUM category is one dwelling unit per 3.5 acres. This comes out to a maximum development potential of approximately 1,043 dwelling units.

Development Potential

Moderate Potential: The development potential of this site is at a moderate risk. The current FLU/Zoning category of the project site allows a relatively low residential density development at one du per 10 acres. Up to one du per 3.5 acres is permissible provided that at least 60% of open space is provided by the developer. The Marion Forest Tract is most vulnerable to suburban development given its proximity to existing and planned suburban developments to the north, east, and west. The Mackay Farms Tract abuts existing preservation land and is adjacent to other land uses with the RL FLU designation. Central sewer and water utilities are most likely not available at the project site. The Ocklawaha Bufferlands site as a whole is

located in a rapidly developing area of southern Marion County, and close to more intensive suburban development in Lake and Sumter Counties such as The Villages retirement development. However, new development within the last 20 years tends to be located closer to central utilities and major transportation routes just to the west of the project site.

Transportation Planning Issues

The proposed disjunct project sites are located in the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District 5 in Marion County, along the Lake County border. A majority of the roadways near this project are located within rural areas dominated by agricultural and natural habitats like the Ocklawaha Prairie River Road Trailhead, Lake Weir and Ocklawaha River, surrounded by residential communities. State Road (SR) 500, which is more than 4 miles away, is the only State Road within its proximity. SR 500 is a designated evacuation route. The area northwest of project parcel clockwise to the southeast is surrounded by the Florida Wildlife Corridor, with multiple points coming within 1 mile of the project site itself.

While FDOT finds no adverse impacts to the proposed project at this time, coordination with FDOT's District 5 staff during the acquisition process is recommended to address any transportation system issues that may arise in the future and incorporate them into the management plan as appropriate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Staff in FDEP's DSL and FNAI determined the final project recommendations. Diana Pepe, Paige Kraker and Katie Ramirez in DSL's Office of Environmental Services were responsible for the overall coordination of this report, with contributions from the following:

- Division of Historical Resources: Brandon Ackermann
- Florida Forest Service: Cat Ingram and Brent Dixon
- Florida Natural Areas Inventory: Geoff Parks and Kim Alexander
- Department of Commerce:
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: Jason Ballard, Dean Cox, and Donna Marain
- FDEP Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration: Moira Homann and Kenneth Weaver
- Florida Department of Transportation: Emily Rhodes
- St. Johns River Water Management District: R.H. Davis

APPENDICES**Appendix A:**

Final FF measures table: Report requirement 259.105 (15)d, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

Ocklawaha Bufferlands: Florida Forever Measures Evaluation 20260725

GIS ACRES = 3,294

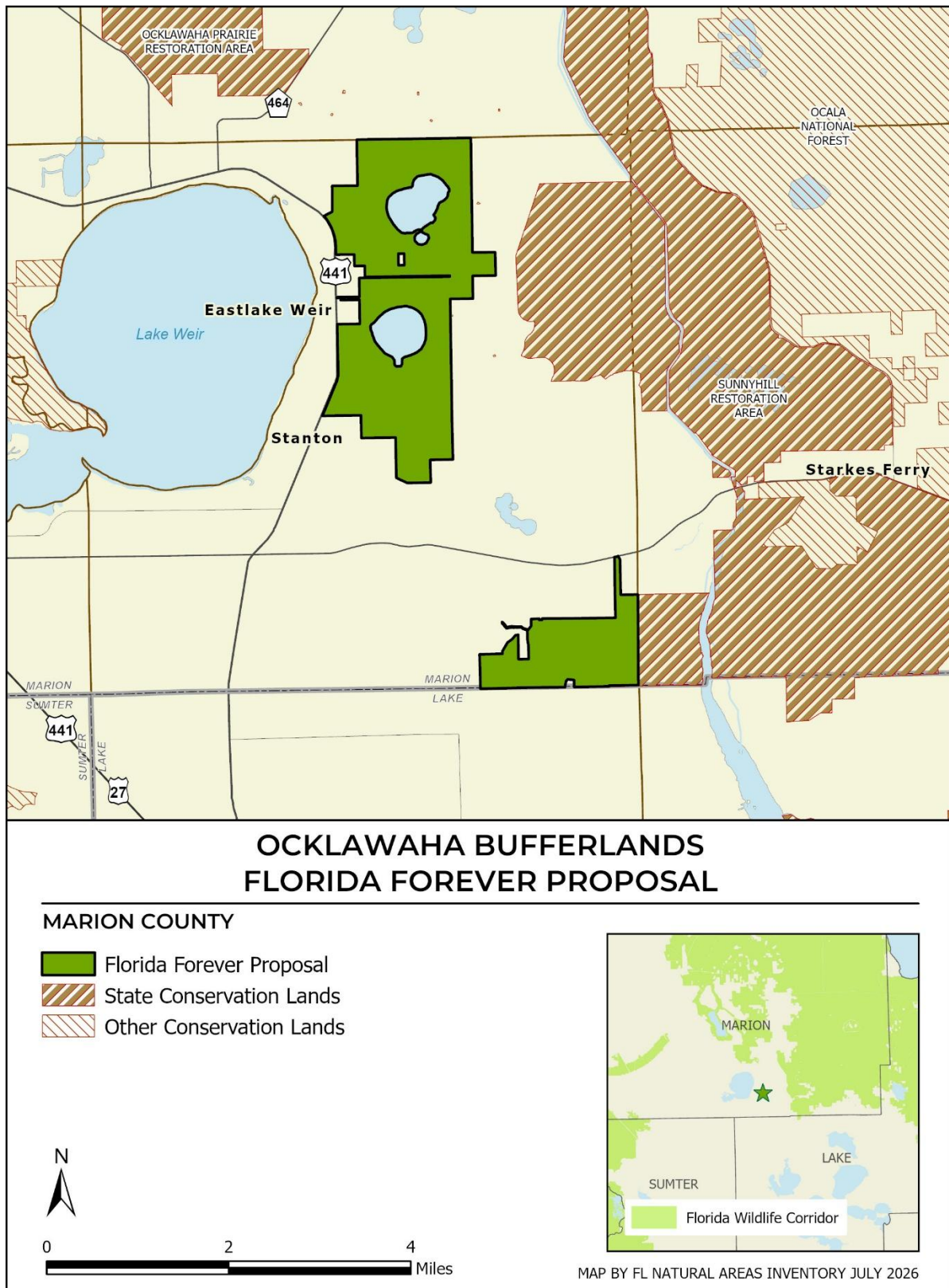
MEASURES	Resource Acres ²	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	237	7%
Priority 3	751	23%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	1,103	34%
Total Acres	2,090	64%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	101	3%
Priority 3	20	< 1%
Priority 4	1,142	35%
Priority 5	436	13%
Priority 6	1,286	39%
Total Acres	2,985	91%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	1,671	51%
Priority 5	0	0%
Total Acres	1,671	51%
B4: Under-represented Natural Communities		
Upland Glade (G1)	0	0%
Pine Rockland (G1)	0	0%
Scrub and Scrubby Flatwoods (G2)	0	0%
Rockland Hammock (G2)	0	0%
Dry Prairie (G2)	0	0%
Seepage Slope (G2)	0	0%
Sandhill (G3)	58	2%
Sandhill Upland Lake (G3)	69	2%
Upland Pine (G3)	0	0%
Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4)	0	0%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	0	0%
Total Acres	127	4%
B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species		
G1	0	
G2	1	
G3	3	
G4	1	
G5	0	
Total	5	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	22	< 1%
Priority 3	155	5%
Priority 4	347	11%
Priority 5	29	< 1%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	553	17%

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres ²	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	125	4%
Priority 5	81	2%
Priority 6	1,248	38%
Priority 7	1,835	56%
Total Acres	3,289	100%
C7: Fragile Coastal Resources		
Fragile Coastal Uplands	0	0%
Imperiled Coastal Lakes	0	0%
Coastal Wetlands	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
C8: Functional Wetlands		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	3	< 1%
Priority 3	76	2%
Priority 4	117	4%
Priority 5	6	< 1%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	201	6%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	652	20%
Priority 2	639	19%
Priority 3	1,157	35%
Priority 4	614	19%
Priority 5	230	7%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	3,291	100%
E2: Recreational Trails (miles)		
(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)		
Land Trail Priorities	0.0	
Land Trail Opportunities	0.0	
Total Miles	0.0	
F2: Arch. & Historical Sites (number)		
	0 sites	
G1: Sustainable Forestry		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	4	< 1%
Priority 4	272	8%
Priority 5	1,107	34%
Total Acres	1,384	42%
G3: Forestland for Recharge		
	1,120	34%

*Acres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted. This analysis converts site boundary into pixels, which causes slight differences from GIS acres; this effect is most noticeable on small sites.

Appendix B:

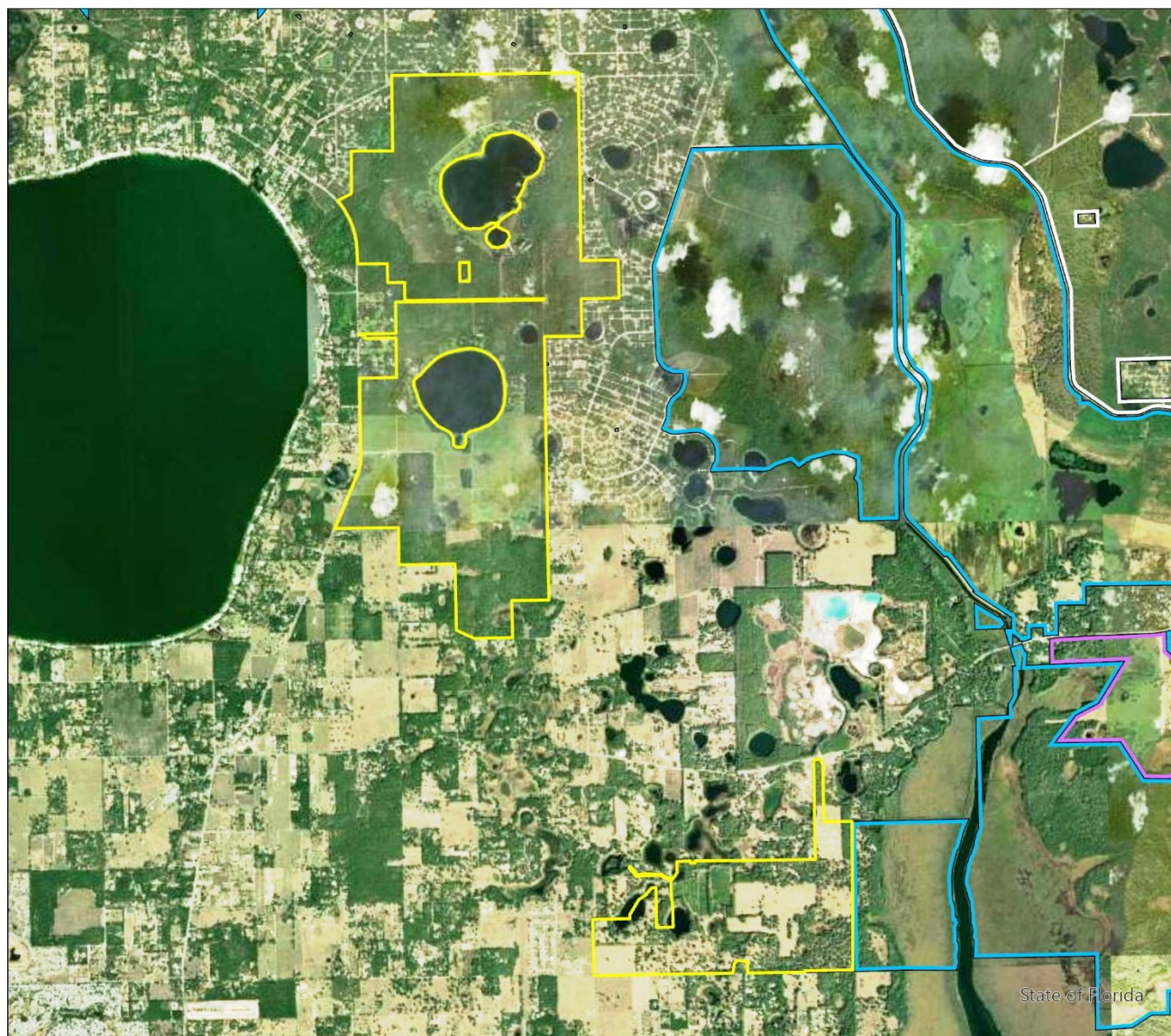
Final FF proposal boundary maps: Report requirement 259.105 (15)k, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

B1: Florida Forever map

B2: Aerial map

OCKLAWAHA BUFFERLANDS FLORIDA FOREVER PROPOSAL

FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSAL BOUNDARY AS OF AUGUST 2026



Map Produced by: FL Natural Areas Inventory, N. Pasco, August 2026

Background: ESRI World Imagery



- Florida Forever Proposal Boundary
- Existing Federal Conservation Lands
- Existing Water Management District Conservation Lands
- Existing Private Conservation Lands



Appendix C:
PROPERTY ID #'S FOR FINAL RECOMMENDED BOUNDARY

County	Parcel ID	Owner	Acres	Just (Market) Value	Parcel Designation
Marion	48512-000-00	Fig Lake Preserve LLLP	1,227.3	\$10,401,917	Essential
Marion	49248-000-00	Craig K. Collins Trust	55.01	\$607,683	Essential
Marion	49248-001-00	Bailey C. Winston Jr. Trust	72.73	\$1,833,282	Essential
Marion	49248-002-00	Charles T. Collins Trust	22.04	\$284,138	Essential
Marion	49248-003-00	James A. Bailey Rev. Trust	68.16	\$842,890	Essential
Marion	49248-004-00	Craig K. Collins	57.8	\$1,053,814	Essential
Marion	49258-000-00	Ocala Manufacturing Co. LTD	1,018.29	\$10,300,006	Essential
Marion	50123-000-00	Anne S. Mackay Rev. Trust	60.31	\$642,600	Essential
Marion	50124-000-00	Anne S. Mackay Rev. Trust	30.09	\$284,962	Essential
Marion	50124-001-00	K3CM Properties Farm LLC	14.9	\$118,220	Essential
Marion	50129-000-00	Anne S. Mackay Rev. Trust	37.99	\$334,254	Essential
Marion	50129-001-01	K3CM Properties Farm LLC	10.18	\$184,336	Essential
Marion	50129-001-02	K3CM Properties Farm LLC	9.45	\$59,624	Essential
Marion	50129-004-00	K3CM Properties Farm LLC	104.87	\$907,167	Essential
Marion	50148-002-00	K3CM Properties Farm LLC	31.71	\$281,607	Essential
Marion	50148-003-00	K3CM Properties Farm LLC	27.2	\$193,892	Essential
Marion	50148-004-00	Eloise B. Mackay Credit Shelter	98.79	\$951,570	Essential
Marion	50148-005-00	George A. Mackay	115.51	\$1,152,885	Essential
Marion	50148-006-00	Mary Ann Garner Trust	117.28	\$1,145,434	Essential
Marion	50148-007-00	David L. Mackay	114.62	\$1,213,327	Essential
		TOTAL	3,294.24	\$32,793,609	

Appendix D:

Imperiled Species FNAI Ranking Definitions

FNAI GLOBAL ELEMENT RANK

- G1** = Critically imperiled globally because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- G2** = Imperiled globally because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- G3** = Either very rare and local throughout its range (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.
- G4** = Apparently secure globally (may be rare in parts of range).
- G5** = Demonstrably secure globally.
- GH** = Of historical occurrence throughout its range, may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).
- GX** = Believed to be extinct throughout range.
- GXC** = Extirpated from the wild but still known from captivity or cultivation.
- G#?** = Tentative rank (e.g., G2?).
- G#G#** = Range of rank; insufficient data to assign specific global rank (e.g., G2G3).
- G#T#** = Rank of a taxonomic subgroup such as a subspecies or variety; the G portion of the rank refers to the entire species and the T portion refers to the specific subgroup; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G3T1).
- G#Q** = Rank of questionable species - ranked as species but questionable whether it is species or subspecies; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G2Q).
- G#T#Q** = Same as above, but validity as subspecies or variety is questioned.
- GU** = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned (e.g., GUT2).
- GNA** = Ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).
- GNR** = Element not yet ranked (temporary).
- GNRTNR** = Neither the element nor the taxonomic subgroup has yet been ranked.

FNAI STATE ELEMENT RANK

- S1** = Critically imperiled in Florida because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- S2** = Imperiled in Florida because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- S3** = Either very rare and local in Florida (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.
- S4** = Apparently secure in Florida (may be rare in parts of range).
- S5** = Demonstrably secure in Florida.
- SH** = Of historical occurrence in Florida, possibly extirpated, but may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).
- SX** = Believed to be extirpated throughout Florida.
- SU** = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned.
- SNA** = State ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).
- SNR** = Element not yet ranked (temporary).

Appendix E:
Site Visit Photos



Federally Threatened sand skink tracks



Florida black bear tracks



Silver Lake



Sandhill upland lake



Gopher tortoise burrow



Scrub stylisma



Fig Lake



Dry marsh lake



Orange grove

Florida Forever Project Evaluation Report

Putnam Clay Timberlands ***Clay & Putnam Counties***



Acquisition Type: Fee Simple and Less-Than-Fee

Acres: 6,977

Just Value: \$30,431,440

Application Date: April 15, 2026

Project Sponsors: Putnam Land Conservancy

Prepared By:

Division of State Lands

Office of Environmental Services



Submitted to the Acquisition and Restoration Council

October 9, 2026

Executive Summary

The Putnam Clay Timberlands Florida Forever proposal contains 26 parcels owned by Three Steps Forest LLC and Wetland Preserve LLC, totaling approximately 6,977 acres in Clay and Putnam counties. The property is proposed for fee simple and less-than-fee acquisition with approximately 2,600 acres to be managed by the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) as a part of the J.P. Hall Bayard Point Conservation Area, $\pm 4,245$ acres to be managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) as part of the Bayard Wildlife Management Area. The east-west Decoy Road will serve as the dividing line between the lands managed by the two agencies. The remaining ± 184 acres proposed for less-than-fee. The proposal has a tax assessed value of \$30,431,440.

The property is currently used for silviculture and has been managed for timber since the 1960s. The area was recently burned by an extensive wildfire, affecting a significant portion of the proposal. Following the fire, the site was cleared for salvage timber and replanted. As a working timber operation, a majority of the project (58%) is made up of planted slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*), loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) and occasionally longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*).

The most common natural community type on the Putnam Clay Timberlands is baygall, making up approximately 10% of the site. Baygall is largely concentrated in the northwestern portion, found along the ecotone between former flatwoods converted to planted pine and basins or floodplain swamps. Canopies are dominated by loblolly bay (*Gordonia lasianthus*) and sweetbay (*Magnolia virginiana* var. *australis*). While there were some effects from the wildfire, the impacts were limited and did not notably affect the tree canopy.

The proposal lies approximately 1.5 miles west of the St. Johns River. Additionally, the property is within the North Florida Regional Water Supply Plan, the Lower St. Johns River Main Stem Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP), and the Surface Water Improvement and Management Plan for the Lower St. Johns River Basin. Over one-third of the property is made up of a variety of wetland community types, providing surface water and floodplain protection to the St. Johns River.

Several rare, imperiled and long-ranging species have been documented on the project site; including gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) and Florida sandhill crane (*Antigone canadensis pratensis*). During the site assessment, Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*) tracks were observed (see Appendix F for photos).

Acquisition of the Putnam Clay Timberlands proposal would provide a buffer for the J.P. Hall Bayard Point Conservation Area, Bayard Wildlife Management Area, and the St. Johns River.

If approved for addition to the 2027 Florida Forever Priority List, the proposal should be considered as an addition to the Northeast Florida Timberlands and Watershed Reserve project in the Partnerships and Regional Incentives category. All $\pm 6,977$ acres proposed for acquisition are considered essential due to the resources documented on the property (see Appendix C). An interagency team conducted a site visit on July 9, 2026. Information included in this report is a result of the site visit.

PURPOSE FOR ACQUISITION

The Putnam Clay Timberlands proposal would expand existing state conservation lands and provide a buffer from development. Through the conservation of lands along the western side of the St. Johns River the proposal will help protect the water quality and quantity of the river and as well as habitat for several rare and imperiled species such as gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*), Florida sandhill crane (*Antigone canadensis pratensis*) and several species of imperiled wading birds.

Acquisition of this project would meet the following Florida Forever Goals, Criteria and Priorities:

Goal	Criteria		Priority	
A ☒	(a) ☒	(h) ☒	(a) ☐	(h) ☐
B ☒	(b) ☒	(i) ☐	(b) ☐	
C ☒	(c) ☒	(j) ☐	(c) ☒	
D ☒	(d) ☐	(k) ☒	(d) ☒	
E ☒	(e) ☐	(l) ☐	(e) ☐	
F ☐	(f) ☒		(f) ☐	
G ☒	(g) ☐		(g) ☐	
H ☐				
I ☐				

*Projects proposed to be funded pursuant to Section 259.105(3)(b), F.S., must meet at least one of the criteria outlined under Section 259.105(9), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0021, F.A.C., and shall meet at least two of the Florida Forever goals and measures outlined in Section 259.105(4), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0022, F.A.C.

LOCATION AND PROXIMITY TO OTHER MANAGED AREAS

The Putnam Clay Timberlands proposal includes ca. 6,977.2 acres in Putnam and Clay counties. The proposed project is a contiguous block of land under 2 separate ownerships. Property owned by Three Steps Forest LLC (the majority of the site) is proposed for fee-simple acquisition; the remaining ca. 184 acres is proposed for less-than-fee protection. Fee-simple portions of the project are anticipated to be divided into areas managed by FWC and by SJRWMD.

The Putnam Clay Timberlands property is a roughly diamond-shaped block of land extending about 8 miles north to south and up to 2 miles wide at its widest point. It is situated in eastern Putnam and Clay counties ca. 0.7 to 2 miles west of the St. Johns River, ca. 5 miles south of Green Cove Springs and ca. 9 miles north of Palatka. The northern point of the property extends between two southerly projections of Bayard Conservation Area, with the proposal's

western boundary adjoining the western arm of Bayard Conservation Area and the proposal's eastern boundary about 0.6 miles from the Conservation Area's eastern arm. Other protected lands near the property include Sundew Mitigation Bank (0.5 miles west of the proposal), Los Ninos Rural Lands Protection Easement (ca. 4 miles south), and Etoniah Creek Rural Lands Protection Easement (ca. 6.3 miles southwest); about 8 miles west is a major (though discontinuous) north-south wildlife corridor, including Mike Roess Goldhead Branch State Park and Camp Blanding Military Reservation, and extending to Osceola and Ocala National Forests. To the east between 3 and 10 miles away there are numerous (though scattered) conservation lands, but these are isolated from the proposal by the river.

RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

Florida Natural Areas Inventory

This evaluation is based on field observations as well as information gathered from the proposal, aerial photography, U.S. Geological Survey 7.5' topographic maps, Cooperative Land Cover data (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission [FWC] and Florida Natural Areas Inventory [FNAI], Florida Cooperative Land Cover Map, version 4.0), the FNAI Natural Heritage database, and other publicly available GIS data sources. A field survey was conducted on July 9, 2026, by the Acquisition and Restoration Council liaison staff, including FNAI biologists Geoff Parks and Kim Alexander.

The proposal lies almost entirely in the lower St. Johns River Valley, at the foot of the escarpment that drops from the Duval Uplands to the west. Along the western margin of the property there are small areas of relatively steep slopes from the uplands, but otherwise the property is nearly level, with a gentle slope towards the river. Most of the property lies between about 20 and 35 feet above sea level, with the uplands at the western margin reaching 65-70 feet.

Overall, the site is dominated by poorly-drained flatwoods and wetlands soils. Drainage across the property is eastward towards the St. Johns and generally poorly defined, although two named creeks originate on or cross the property. Clarkes Creek originates in the uplands west of the proposal as a steeply incised stream and flows in a well-defined channel across the property about one-third of the way from the proposal's north end. The southern portion of the proposal contains the headwaters of Cedar Creek.

This property has long been used for timber production, with most of the uplands converted to pine plantations and intact native vegetation mostly limited to wet areas. About 21% of the site consists of natural communities. A significant wildfire burned a large portion of the property in 2026.

The most abundant natural community on the proposal is baygall. Baygalls are found at intermediate elevations between pine plantations (former flatwoods) and basin or floodplain swamps, mainly limited to the northern portions of the site, where they are especially concentrated near the proposal's western edge. Baygalls are dominated by evergreen broadleaf trees such as loblolly bay and sweetbay, often with an emergent stratum of slash pine. A smaller proportion of the canopy may be made up of swamp tupelo (*Nyssa biflora*), swamp laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*), water oak (*Quercus nigra*) and/or pond cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*). Although baygall stands are sometimes somewhat open, shrubs and subcanopy trees are often dense, including such species as large gallberry (*Ilex coriacea*), coastalplain staggerbush (*Lyonia fruticosa*), fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*), swamp azalea

(*Rhododendron viscosum* var. *viscosum*), saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), swamp bay (*Tamala palustris*), poison sumac (*Toxicodendron vernix*) and hairy highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium fuscatum*), often intertwined with cat greenbriar (*Smilax glauca*) and laurel greenbriar (*Smilax laurifolia*). An herb layer can be dense or nearly lacking, consisting of Carolina redroot (*Lachnanthes caroliniana*), cinnamon fern (*Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*), Virginia chain fern (*Anchistea virginica*) and tailed bracken (*Pteridium pseudocaudatum*). Where wildfire impacts were observed in the baygalls, they were patchy and did not notably affect the tree canopy.

Away from the northwestern edge of the site, bottomland forests largely replace baygalls in lower wet areas. These forests are quite diverse, with a variety of tree species such as red maple (*Acer rubrum*), sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), sweetbay, swamp tupelo, slash pine, swamp laurel oak, water oak, pond cypress, bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) and Florida elm (*Ulmus americana* var. *floridana*) making up the canopy. The understory consists of regenerating canopy species along with American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*) and dahoon (*Ilex cassine*). The shrub layer is generally open but occasionally dense, and includes common buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), Gulf sebastian-bush (*Ditrysinia fruticosa*), roundpod St. John's wort (*Hypericum cistifolium*), gallberry (*Ilex glabra*), Virginia willow (*Itea virginica*), fetterbush, southern bayberry (*Morella cerifera*), mountain azalea (*Rhododendron canescens*), saw palmetto, swamp bay and hairy highbush blueberry. A dense herb layer is often present; herbs include woodoats (*Chasmanthium* sp.), woolly witchgrass (*Dichantherium scabriusculum*), clustered bushmint (*Hyptis alata*), rush (*Juncus* sp.), netted chain fern (*Lorinseria areolata*), royal fern (*Osmunda spectabilis*), cinnamon fern, green arrow arum (*Peltandra virginica*), sphagnum moss (*Sphagnum* sp.), Virginia chain fern, early whitetop fleabane (*Erigeron vernus*), tenangle pipewort (*Eriocaulon decangulare*) and yellow jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*). Vines are occasional, with eastern poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans* var. *radicans*), muscadine (*Muscadinia rotundifolia* var. *rotundifolia*), laurel greenbriar and coral greenbriar (*Smilax walteri*) present to varying degrees. Epiphytes include Bartram's air-plant (*Tillandsia bartramii*) and ballmoss (*Tillandsia recurvata*). Small basin swamp inclusions are often present in low pockets in the bottomland forests.

Irregularly shaped basin swamps are also scattered across the site in low areas where standing water is more common. The canopy is dominated by swamp tupelo, slash pine and cypress; aside from mortality or injury of many pines, wildfire has had little impact on the canopy in many of these swamps. Other trees such as red maple, swamp laurel oak and cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*) are occasional. The shrub layer is sparse except at the edges and mainly contains common buttonbush, fetterbush and southern bayberry. Herbaceous plants are patchy but sometimes common, with Virginia chain fern, bandana-of-the-Everglades (*Canna flaccida*), clustered sedge (*Carex glaucescens*), woodoats, Carolina redroot and cinnamon fern commonly seen. Recent wildfires burned into some of the basin swamps, and due to the codominance of pines in the canopy, some have been impacted by salvage logging, causing soil disturbance and damage to non-pine species.

Dome swamps are frequent amidst the pine plantations, but generally small, and thus make up only a small portion of the site. These wetlands vary in condition. The canopy is often young and sparse, normally consisting of pond cypress, which is sometimes codominant with slash pine. Loblolly bay is often present. Many dome swamps were burned through by recent wildfires.

Narrow bands of floodplain swamp surround small blackwater streams along the eastern edge of the site. Some of these have been burned or partially burned, although much of the tree canopy remains intact. The canopy of these swamps is generally pond cypress, sweetbay and swamp tupelo. Slash pine is also often present, and sometimes dominant. The shrub layer is sparse to moderate and consists of titi (*Cyrilla racemiflora*) and a few other hydric species. There is a sparse to moderate groundcover of Virginia chain fern and witchgrass (*Dichanthelium* sp.). Laurel greenbrier is the most common vine.

A relatively narrow undisturbed corridor along Clarkes Creek preserves a portion of the natural gradient between wetter communities near the creek to more mesic to dry communities in the surrounding uplands. Here, diverse bottomland forests occur adjacent to the blackwater stream, grading into a narrow zone of upland hardwood forest and mesic hammock to the south, and baygall to the north. The upland hardwood forest canopy is mature and includes pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*), southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), swamp laurel oak, and live oak (*Quercus virginiana*). Smallflower pawpaw (*Asimina parviflora*) is a common shrub, and there are also American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) and patches of saw palmetto. Crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*) is common along the forest floor and climbing tree trunks; sarsaparilla vine (*Smilax pumila*) and variable witchgrass (*Dichanthelium commutatum*) make up a patchy groundcover. Bartram's air-plant commonly occurs on limbs and trunks of the canopy trees.

Mesic hammock has a sparse to full canopy of live oak with loblolly pine, patches of saw palmetto and occasional American beautyberry. There is little groundcover other than low-growing sarsaparilla vine.

Most of the site (58%) consists of pine plantations. Pine plantations on the site have largely been impacted by recent wildfire, and extensive salvage clearing has taken place in recent months, with bare, rutted soil and logging slash over large areas of the site. Remaining pine plantations consist typically of bedded stands of slash pine, loblolly pine, and in some cases, longleaf pine. Small trees, shrubs and vines are sometimes common, including tangles of yellow jessamine, muscadine, earleaf greenbrier (*Smilax auriculata*) and/or cat greenbrier, and a variable midstory or shrub layer of species such as sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*), wild olive (*Carthagenia americana*), common persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), water oak, slimleaf pawpaw (*Asimina angustifolia*), woolly pawpaw (*Asimina incana*), dwarf pawpaw (*Asimina pygmaea*), myrtle oak (*Quercus myrtifolia*), gallberry and saw palmetto. Where herbaceous plants occur, bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*) can be common. However, some plantations have remnant flatwoods herbs that can include blue maidencane (*Amphicarpum muehlenbergianum*), dryland white bluestem (*Andropogon capillipes*), occasional southern wiregrass (*Aristida beyrichiana*), threeawn (*Aristida* sp.), coastalplain chaffhead (*Carphephorus corymbosus*), tread softly (*Cnidoscolus stimulosus*), needleleaf witchgrass (*Dichanthelium aciculare*), oblongleaf twinflower (*Dyschoriste oblongifolia*), tall elephantsfoot (*Elephantopus elatus*), smallflower thoroughwort (*Eupatorium semiserratum*), spurges (*Euphorbia* sp.), Elliott's milkpea (*Galactia elliotii*), gopher apple (*Geobalanus oblongifolius*), tailed bracken, blackroot (*Pterocaulon pycnostachyum*), dwarf live oak (*Quercus minima*), meadowbeauty (*Rhexia* sp.), sand blackberry (*Rubus cuneifolius*), sawtooth blackberry (*Rubus pensilvanicus*), Chapman's goldenrod (*Solidago chapmanii*), pinebarren goldenrod (*Solidago fistulosa*), sweet goldenrod (*Solidago odora*), dropseed sp. (*Sporobolus osceolensis* or *Sporobolus floridanus*), goat's rue (*Tephrosia virginiana*) and shiny blueberry (*Vaccinium myrsinites*).

Some formerly cleared areas or pinelands that have not been harvested, thinned or burned are dominated by a mix of opportunistic hardwoods and shrubs, which vary greatly depending on soil moisture. The canopy and subcanopy of these successional hardwood forests can contain red maple, loblolly bay, sweetgum, sweetbay, swamp tupelo, slash pine, pond pine (*Pinus serotina*), sand live oak, swamp laurel oak, water oak, swamp bay and bald cypress. Shrubs can include woolly pawpaw, gallberry, rusty staggerbush (*Lyonia ferruginea*), fetterbush, southern bayberry, deerberry (*Vaccinium stamineum*) tailed bracken, sweet goldenrod, scurf hoary-pea (*Tephrosia chrysophylla*) and noseburn (*Tragia* sp.). Vines are often abundant, with muscadine, crossvine, earleaf greenbrier and saw greenbrier (*Smilax bona-nox*). Heavy pine needle litter may be present and needle drape can be common throughout the below-canopy layers.

Successional hydric shrublands or forests occur where logging, clearing or other disturbances have affected wetlands. Canopy composition is similar to various swamp communities, but the stands are often younger, dominated by more weedy species such as sweetgum and water oak and often have an impenetrable layer of shrubs, saplings and vines. Other woody species include red maple, loblolly bay, swamp tupelo, slash pine, loblolly pine, swamp laurel oak, live oak, pond cypress, red chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*), common buttonbush, St. Andrew's cross (*Hypericum hypericoides*), dahoon, southern bayberry, sawtooth blackberry and saw palmetto. Herbs can be nearly absent or patchy, and include Virginia chain fern, clustered sedge and Carolina redroot. Vines such as cat greenbrier, laurel greenbrier, eastern poison ivy, grape (*Vitis* sp.) and muscadine are common.

There is no development on the site. A network of unpaved forest roads traverse the property, making up about 2% of the total acreage. Very small areas of clearing, pasture and artificial pond are the only other land uses, which collectively occupy only a negligible portion of the property.

Invasive plants appear to be uncommon on the proposal. The most significant appears to be torpedo grass (*Panicum repens*, Florida Invasive Species Council [FISC] Category 1) which was noted to be the dominant cover along some of the vehicle trails. Japanese climbing fern (*Lygodium japonicum*, FISC – I) was also noted in one location.

Table 1. Natural communities and landcover types within Florida Forever proposal

Community or Landcover	Acre	Percent of Proposal
baygall	669	10%
bottomland forest	398	6%
basin swamp	237	3%
dome swamp	87	1%
floodplain swamp	57	1%
mesic hammock	9	< 1%
upland hardwood forest	7	< 1%
swamp lake	1	< 1%
pine plantation	4,079	58%
successional hydric shrubland/forest	1,274	18%
road	116	2%
successional hardwood forest	36	1%
artificial pond	3	< 1%
pasture-improved	2	< 1%
clearing/regeneration	2	< 1%

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

This summary provides an assessment of fish and wildlife resources on the Putnam Clay Timberlands Florida Forever proposal based upon field observations from the July 9, 2026, site visit and associated GIS analysis and review of species population and status resources.

The fee simple property is comprised of pine plantations, mostly loblolly, with scattered dome and basin swamps and hydric pine flatwoods. It is dissected by several creek drainages with associated floodplain swamps and bottomland forests. Most of the property lies at elevations between 20 and 35 feet above sea level and much had standing water. The National Wetlands Inventory identified 36% of the property as wetlands, and 1,553 acres are designated by FNAI as Priority 2 and 3 (on a 1-6 scale of decreasing priority) floodplain resources.

After a long history of intensive silviculture in the uplands since at least the 1960s, the pine flatwoods and dome swamp natural communities are in fair to good condition. It appears that 15-35% of the property has not been planted or been in recent timber harvest rotation, and this area is dominated by roughly equal measures of mixed hardwood-coniferous swamps, scrub-shrub wetlands and wet flatwoods. Observations indicate some ditching to connect domes to the creeks was evident, and this hydrological alteration appears to drain some wet flatwoods areas to facilitate timber production. Some of the flatwoods may not have been in a regular harvest rotation but were likely harvested; bedding is not always apparent in these areas and native plants are more common than in typical planted pine areas. Some hydrologic restoration may be needed to allow for the dome swamps to recover full ecological function over time. Larger dome swamps and creek bottoms appear to be mostly intact.

The less than fee property is also pine plantation. It is heavily planted with bedded pine, the associated understory is primarily dense palmetto and successional oak, and it is characterized by modified drainage.

Due to a wildfire event in April and May 2026, most pine stands visited were clearcut or severely damaged pre-merchantable stands, and some areas were already being replanted. The use of bedding as site preparation for planting was widely evident, but some components of native herbaceous ground cover remained. Several unburned thinned stands on the fee simple property appeared to have good herbaceous ground cover. Establishing a prescribed fire program as the uplands are restored from the wildfire on this property will recover much of their historic value for wildlife over time.

There is a relatively low occurrence of invasive flora. Putnam and Clay counties have cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*) along most road shoulders in close proximity to the property, and one small patch was observed on the property near a boundary. Chinese tallow (*Triadica sebifera*), Japanese climbing fern and torpedo grass were also observed. Feral hog (*Sus scrofa*) tracks were the only sign of non-native fauna.

Regular controlled burns can open the tree canopy and restore herbaceous ground cover, which helps rare plants and animals that rely on open pine forests. Also, hydrologic and topographic (bedding removal) restoration work will facilitate natural surface water flow and wetland water level fluctuations, encouraging establishment of native plants. Habitat is currently adequate for game species, such as white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), and for common non-game species. Management improvements will support some imperiled species and state Species of Greatest Conservation

Need (SGCN), particularly wading birds, cavity-nesting birds, passerines (order *Passeriformes*), and nightjars (family *Caprimulgidae*). Wildlife observed included state Threatened Florida sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis pratensis*), white ibis (*Eudocimus albus*), and many common passerine species. In addition, Florida black bear tracks were observed, and State Threatened gopher tortoise burrows were identified in a small area near the western property line at Decoy Road.

The FWC Florida Landscape Assessment Model mean score for the proposal is 5.0 (on a 0–10 increasing value scale). The proposal contains designated FWC Strategic Habitat Conservation Area (SHCA) for two species: 314 acres of Priority 3 SHCA (on a 1-5 scale of decreasing priority) for the swallow-tailed kite (*Elanoides forficatus*; SGCN) and over 6,600 acres of Priority 5 SHCA for the Florida black bear. FWC monitoring indicates bears are common throughout the property and are frequent on over 3,600 acres. There are also over 2,100 acres designated as Rare Fish and Imperiled Waters for the ironcolor shiner (*Notropis chalybaeus*).

The State Threatened Black Creek crayfish (*Procambarus pictus*) has 19 delineated populations and they are all in the Lower St. Johns River Basin, one of which is in Clarkes Creek, within the project boundaries. This species is proposed as federally Threatened and the proposed critical habitat also falls within the proposal boundaries. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has assessed the Clarkes Creek population to have high baseline habitat quality due to stream morphology and forest cover, but ultimately the Clarkes Creek population is likely to be only moderately resilient due to poor water quality (high nitrogen) and high anthropogenic uses (mainly timber plantations) within the riparian zones of this population's habitat (USFWS, 2020). Approximately one-third of the length of this creek is within the proposal boundary, in the northern portion. Use of Primary Zone Best Management Practices will protect water quality and may improve it over time, which could elevate the resiliency of this crayfish population.

In conclusion, the Putnam Clay Timberlands is a good candidate for state acquisition. Acquisition of the fee simple tract would expand the managed lands associated with the J.P. Hall Bayard Conservation Area by more than 30%. This enlarged area of contiguous conservation lands would be particularly beneficial to wide-ranging wildlife species such as the Florida black bear. A primary initial benefit of acquisition would be protection of the wetlands and creek drainages. Subsequently, a large improvement in upland wildlife habitat can be expected with a transition to less intensive silvicultural practices and the reintroduction of prescribed fire. In addition to supporting game species and wildlife in general, these benefits will support some imperiled species and SGCN. The property's road system is adequate and would be improved to provide additional recreational opportunities including hiking, bird watching and hunting in fast growing Northeast Florida. The less than fee tract with a border on Orange Creek would also provide wildlife habitat and valuable water resource protection.

GOALS, MEASURES AND CRITERIA

GOAL A:

ENHANCE THE COORDINATION AND COMPLETION OF LAND ACQUISITION PROJECTS

Measure A1:

The number of acres acquired through the state's land acquisition programs that contribute to the enhancement of essential natural resources, ecosystem service parcels, and connecting linkage corridors as identified and developed by the best available scientific data.

If acquired, all 6,977 acres would contribute to ecosystem service parcels and connecting linkage corridors.

Measure A2:

The number of acres protected through the use of alternatives to fee simple acquisition.

Approximately 184 acres of the proposed project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition via conservation easement.

GOAL B:

INCREASE THE PROTECTION OF FLORIDA'S BIODIVERSITY AT THE SPECIES, NATURAL COMMUNITY, AND LANDSCAPE LEVELS

Measure B1:

The number of acres acquired of significant Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas.

The SHCA Florida Forever Conservation Needs layer identifies important remaining habitat conservation needs for 62 terrestrial vertebrates on private lands. Priority 1 and 2 represent habitat for species considered imperiled or critically imperiled in Florida. The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation (FFME) table (Appendix B) reports the site contains approximately 6,666 acres (96% of site) of SHCAs. This is primarily within Priority 5 (91% of site) with the remainder in Priority 3 (5%).

Measure B2:

The number of acres acquired of highest priority conservation areas for Florida's rarest species.

Habitat conservation priorities for 634 of Florida's rarest species were mapped and divided into six priority classes. The FFME reports the proposed property contains approximately 1,848 acres (26% of site) of rare species habitat. The habitat is primarily in Priority 6 (25% of site), with the remainder in Priorities 5 and 4 (1% and < 1%, respectively).

The following table lists the acres of habitat for each species that may be found on the site, based on the FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities. Please note that habitats for these species overlap, so that the sum total of habitat for all species is more than the total acreage of the priority conservation areas. Acreage for aquatic species includes a terrestrial buffer.

Table 2. Rare species habitat based on FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	Acres
<i>Balduina atropurpurea</i>	purple honeycomb-head	G2	295
<i>Hartwrightia floridana</i>	hartwrightia	G2	7
<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	Florida sandhill crane	G5T2	789
<i>Mycteria americana</i>	wood stork	G4	876

See Appendix E for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

Measure B3:

The number of acres acquired of significant landscapes, landscape linkages, and conservation corridors, giving priority to completing linkages.

The FFME reports approximately 6,850 acres (98%) of the proposal contribute to protection of ecological greenways, entirely within Priority 5 areas. Prioritization is based on such factors as

importance for wide-ranging species like Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*) and Florida black bear, importance for maintaining a connected reserve network and riparian corridors.

Measure B4:

The number of acres acquired of under-represented native ecosystems.

The Florida Forever natural community analysis includes only those communities that are under-represented on existing conservation lands. This analysis provides a conservative estimate of the extent of these communities, because it identifies only relatively undisturbed portions of these communities that occur within their historic range. The FFME table lists the acreages of under-represented natural communities found on the site. Based on this analysis, the Putnam Clay Timberlands proposal contains 7 acres of upland hardwood forest.

Measure B5:

The number of landscape-sized protection areas of at least 50,000 acres that exhibit a mosaic of predominantly intact or restorable natural communities established through new acquisition projects, or augmentations to previous projects.

The Putnam Clay Timberlands proposal, while adjacent to Bayard Conservation Area, would not contribute to a contiguous landscape-sized protection area of at least 50,000 acres.

Measure B6:

The percentage increase in the number of occurrences of imperiled species on publicly managed conservation areas.

Although the majority of the site has long been impacted by intensive forestry operations, there are some rare wildlife species documented on the site (see Table 3). During the site visit, at least one active gopher tortoise burrow was observed in a xeric pine plantation. The project is in an area where Florida black bear is classified by FWC as common to abundant, and fresh bear tracks were seen during the site visit. Florida sandhill cranes were also noted onsite.

Table 3. Rare plants and animals documented or reported to occur within the proposed project

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	State Rank	Federal Status	State Status
Rare plants documented on site					
none					
Additional rare plants reported on site by applicant					
none					
Rare animals documented on site					
<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>	gopher tortoise	G3	S3	N	ST
<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	Florida sandhill crane	G5T2	S2	N	ST
<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	little blue heron	G5	S4	N	ST
<i>Eudocimus albus</i>	white ibis	G5	S4	N	N
<i>Ursus americanus floridanus</i>	Florida black bear	G5T4	S4	N	N
Additional rare animals reported on site by applicant					
none					

See Appendix E for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

GOAL C:

PROTECT, RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE QUALITY OF NATURAL FUNCTIONS OF LAND, WATER, AND WETLAND SYSTEMS OF THE STATE

Measure C1:

The number of acres of publicly-owned land identified as needing restoration; enhancement, and management, acres undergoing restoration or enhancement; acres with restoration activities completed, and acres managed to maintain such restored or enhanced conditions; the number of acres which represent actual or potential imperiled species habitat; the number of acres which are available pursuant to a management plan to restore, enhance, repopulate, and manage imperiled species habitat; and the number of acres of imperiled species habitat managed, restored, and enhanced, repopulated, or acquired.

A large proportion of the ca. 1,450 acres of forested wetlands (baygall, bottomland forest, basin swamp and floodplain forest) appears to be in relatively good condition and probably requires little management. The extensive acreage of pine plantation has been altered to a great degree by bedding and by recent salvage logging. Given the extirpation of many native plants and the widespread ground disturbance in much of the pine plantations, significant investment would be necessary to fully restore them to natural communities. However, there are some examples of pine plantations with significant native plant diversity in both dry and mesic/wet conditions on the proposal. These stands could be enhanced in terms of their habitat value by implementing regular prescribed fire.

Invasive plant management needs on the property appear to be limited currently; however, with the large-scale salvage logging that is ongoing, it is possible that additional invasive plant introductions have occurred. A baseline assessment of invasive plant infestations should be conducted if acquisition of the property moves forward.

Measure C3:

The percentage completion of targeted capital improvements in surface water improvement and management plans created under s. 373.453 (2), regional or master stormwater management system plans, or other adopted restoration plans.

The project area is within the Lower St. Johns River Main Stem BMAP. The current plan is the 2025 draft. There is a nutrient model for the St. Johns River under development to be completed in 2028. This model will be used in future BMAP updates to determine allocations to meet the Total Maximum Daily Loads and achieve the requirements of the BMAP. Currently the Lower St. Johns River Main Stem is a Class III waterbody, meaning they must be suitable for recreation and support fish consumption and the propagation and maintenance of a healthy, well-balanced population of fish and wildlife. The required loading reductions outlined in the 2003 BMAP were expected to be met by 2023. There is a Surface Water Improvement and Management Plan for the Lower St. Johns River Basin. The latest update is from 2008 and has not been updated on its 5-year interval due to it being superseded by the aforementioned BMAP.

Measure C4:

The number of acres acquired that protect natural floodplain functions.

The FFME reports approximately 2,841 acres (41%) of the proposed project may contribute to the protection of natural floodplain function. This area is mostly divided between Priority 4 (25% of site), Priority 3 (12%) and Priority 2 (4%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C5:

The number of acres acquired that protect surface waters of the State.

The FFME reports approximately 6,974 acres (100%) of the proposed project could provide protection for those surface waters of the State that currently remain in good condition. This area is divided between Priority 4 (34% of site), Priority 3 (29%), Priority 5 (28%) and Priority 2 (8%), with the remainder in Priority 7 (< 1%). These areas represent acreage that contributes to the protection of state-designated Outstanding Florida Waters, springs, rare fish habitat or other surface waters.

Measure C8:

The number of acres of functional wetland systems protected.

The FFME reports approximately 2,869 acres (41%) of the proposed project would provide protection for functional wetland systems. This area is divided between Priority 4 (17% of site), Priority 3 (15%) and Priority 2 (9%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C11:

The number of acres of public conservation lands in which upland invasive, exotic plants are under maintenance control.

Approximately 90%-100% or $\pm 6,125$ acres are speculated to be in maintenance control as estimated from observations during site reconnaissance regarding the extensive site prep necessary for silviculture operations. A small amount of Japanese climbing fern was observed. A survey for complete assessment would be beneficial, especially as it pertains to the property boundaries and wildfire impacted areas.

GOAL D:

ENSURE THAT SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES OF WATER ARE AVAILABLE TO MEET THE CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF NATURAL SYSTEMS AND THE CITIZENS OF THE STATE

Measure D1:

The number of acres acquired which provide retention and storage of surface water in naturally occurring storage areas, such as lakes and wetlands, consistent with the maintenance of water resources or water supplies and consistent with district water supply plans.

The project area lies within the North Florida Regional Water Supply Plan region. Based on 2013 National Wetlands Inventory wetland vegetation coverage GIS data, approximately 4,717 acres of naturally occurring storage areas, including lakes and freshwater wetlands are included in the project area. These retention and storage areas contribute to the maintenance of water resources and water supply within the Lower St. Johns River watershed. The project area does not provide aquifer recharge potential as it is located within an area where aquifer systems are close to the surface.

Measure D2:

The quantity of water made available through the water resource development component of a district water supply plan for which a water management district is responsible.

The 2023 North Florida Regional Water Supply Plan Update identifies a total of four water resource development project options that are near the project area. The listed project options have an estimated total water supply benefit of 3.52 million gallons per day (mgd). These projects vary in project status from planning to completed. These projects are being undertaken by the Clay County Utility Authority.

Measure D3:

The number of acres acquired of groundwater recharge areas critical to springs, sinks, aquifers, other natural systems, or water supply.

The FFME reports approximately 6,977 acres (100%) of the proposed project would provide protection for groundwater recharge areas. This area is mostly divided between Priority 5 (44% of site), Priority 6 (36%), Priority 4 (17%) and Priority 3 (2%), with the remainder in Priority 2 (< 1%). Prioritization is based on features that contribute to aquifer vulnerability such as swallets, thickness of the intermediate aquifer confining unit and closed topographical depressions, as well as areas within springshed protection zones and in proximity to public water supply wells.

Table 4. Spatial Analysis for Potential Water Quality Benefits of the Putnam Clay Timberlands

Categories	Scoring Criteria	Project Score
FDEP High Profile Springs (In 1,2,3 or > spring sheds)	12, 24, 36	
FDEP Select Agricultural Land Use (0-30%, >30-65%, >65%)	4,8,12	
FDEP Florida Aquifer Vulnerability (FAVA)	4,7,10	4
FDEP Special Nutrient Impaired WBIDs	9	9
FDEP Distance to Major Lakes (100, 500, 1000 meters)	8,7,6	
FDEP Springsheds or within 5 miles	10, 7	
FDEP BMAPs	10	10
FDEP Distance to Major Rivers (100, 500, 1000 meters)	6,5,4	
Total Possible	101	23

GIS Evaluation score is converted to a 1 to 5 value (low to high)

FINAL DEAR SCORE = 2, medium low water quality protection benefits

GOAL E:

INCREASE NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED PUBLIC RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Measure E1:

The number of acres acquired that are available for natural resource-based public recreation or education.

Approximately 6,006 acres could be available for natural resource-based public recreation if acquired by the State. Close proximity to State Road 17 will allow opportunity for public access. Interpretive trails may be positioned along an old railway system and Clarkes Creek, and camping, hunting and apiary leases are a multiple-use potential. Some challenges may exist because the road system onsite needs improvement.

Measure E2:

The miles of trails that are available for public recreation, giving priority to those that provide significant connections including those that will assist in completing the Florida National Scenic Trail.

The FFME reports that 2 miles of the land trail priorities and opportunities identified by the Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan (2023 update) come within a quarter mile of the proposal.

GOAL F:

PRESERVE SIGNIFICANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL OR HISTORIC SITES

Measure F1:

The increase in the number of and percentage of historic and archaeological properties listed in the Florida Master Site File or National Register of Historic Places which are protected or preserved for public use.

The Putnam Clay Timberlands Florida Forever proposal would not meet Measure F1 as it contains no cultural resources listed in the Florida Master Site File or National Register of Historic Places.

Measure F2:

The increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in state ownership.

Acquisition of the Putnam Clay Timberlands Florida Forever proposal would not meet Measure F2, as it would not result in an increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in state ownership.

CULTURAL RESOURCES:

According to the Division of Historical Resource's (DHR) Florida Master Site File, there are no recorded cultural resources within the boundary of the Putnam Clay Timberlands Florida Forever proposal. However, several recorded archaeological sites are present immediately outside of the property boundary.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS:

DHR staff did not observe any historical resources on the property during the field review. However, the project's immediate proximity to recorded archaeological sites makes the likelihood of unrecorded resources high. Should any artifacts or other cultural resources be discovered in the future, DHR recommends leaving them in place and contacting DHR's Public Lands Archaeology Program for further evaluation.

GOAL G:

INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF FORESTLAND AVAILABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Measure G1:

The number of acres acquired that are available for sustainable forest management.

Existing plantations will provide future timber sales, and the utilization of existing bedding and site prep would make future timber management for a plantation easier. Evidence of bears, deer, and turkey and other game species can be found on the property, making managing for wildlife and wildlife habitat a viable opportunity. Bedding may be removed or smoothed out to enhance hydrology/natural landscape. Natural regeneration would need to occur to help rehabilitate degraded communities such as dome and basin swamps to their ideal conditions. This property has undergone rapid management change due to intense wildfire conditions resulting in a massive clearcut/salvage sale over the majority of the property. Given that the site is set for bedding, this property would either best be used for more timber production or need rehabilitation to fix natural hydrology and restore natural community types.

The FFME reports approximately 4,780 acres (69% of site) could be available for sustainable forest management, divided between Priority 4 (2,900 acres), Priority 5 (1,097 acres), Priority 3 (720 acres) and Priority 2 (64 acres). Prioritization is based on eight criteria set by the Florida Forest Service: whether trees are natural or planted, size of tract, distance to market, average total height that dominant and codominant pine trees obtain, access/operability, burn frequency, years since last burn and landscape integrity.

Measure G2:

The number of acres of state-owned forestland managed for economic return in accordance with current best management practices.

Approximately 6,125 acres of the forest areas could be managed by the State for economic return in accordance with Best Management Practices. The site could reportedly benefit from a Best Management Practices assessment, especially as it pertains to possible deficiencies with the current culvert system.

Measure G4:

The percentage and number of acres identified for restoration restored by reforestation.

Approximately 3,062 acres or about 45% of the forestland is planned for reforestation following the wildfire in April 2026 and subsequent associated salvage clear-cuts. Wetlands also would benefit from restoration. Natural communities onsite would benefit from various levels of restoration such as prescribed burns, mowing, etc.

CRITERIA

The proposed project meets the following Florida Forever criteria (§ 259.105, F.S.)

- (9)
 - (a) The project meets multiple goals described in subsection (4).
 - (b) The project is part of an ongoing governmental effort to restore, protect, or develop land areas or water resources.
 - (c) The project enhances or facilitates management of properties already under public ownership.
 - (f) The project contributes to the solution of water resource problems on a regional basis.
 - (k) The project may be acquired, in whole or in part, using alternatives to fee simple, including but not limited to, tax incentives, mitigation funds, or other revenues, the purchase of development rights, hunting rights, agricultural or silvicultural rights, or mineral rights or obtaining conservation easements or flowage easements.
- (10) The Acquisition and Restoration Council shall give increased priority to:
 - (c) projects that can be acquired in less than fee ownership, such as a permanent conservation easement;
 - (d) projects that contribute to improving the quality and quantity of surface water and groundwater;

MANAGEMENT

For portions proposed for fee simple acquisition, see Appendix D for the management prospectus.

For portions proposed for less-than-fee acquisition, the primary management responsibility would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management would occur to confirm continued compliance with the conditions of the easement. Monitoring would be

coordinated by the Office of Environmental Services within the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (FDEP) Division of State Land (DSL).

FUNDING SOURCES

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

FUNDING FOR MAPPING, APPRAISAL, NEGOTIATIONS & CLOSING

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

OWNERSHIP PATTERN AND ACQUISITION PLANNING

Title and Legal Access Issues, Jurisdictional and Sovereignty Lands, Legal Issues

Record of title, a designation of jurisdictional and sovereignty lands and any other legal issues will be determined at the time of acquisition and are not known at this time.

Known Encumbrances (easement, long-term leases, restrictive covenants, etc.)

The easements and encumbrances of record would be determined during the appraisal mapping. A current title commitment would be obtained, or the owner's title insurance policy would be depicted or noted on the appraisal map.

Description and location of hazardous waste sites, dumps, borrow pits

There are no apparent contamination sites within the project based on the application form.

Estimated Cost of Appraisal and Mapping

FDEP Bureau of Appraisal estimates \$10,000 to \$20,000 in appraisal fees.

Acquisition Phases

Subject to funding, the Putnam Clay Timberlands Florida Forever project will be phased based upon price.

GOVERNMENT PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT

Contribution to Recreation and Open Space Needs

Acquisition would directly expand conservation areas bordering the Bayard Wildlife Management Area. As the vast majority of the property is proposed for fee acquisition by the State it would become available for public recreation such as hunting, fishing, hiking, or other forms of outdoor recreation.

Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Spaces

Low Potential: Given the overall potential for subdivision, conversion, and/or development, the property would be at a low risk of losing a variety of wetland areas (hardwood, cypress swamp, and freshwater marshes) which are important features for water and floodplain protection along the St. Johns River. Additionally, nearly all of the subject site is designated as priority "Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas" and approximately 1,850 acres are designated as priority areas for rare species habitat.

Potential for Being Subdivided

Low Potential: The potential for subdivision or conversion to other uses is low. The subject site is currently towards the periphery of any significant development pressures from urban areas and is surrounded by agricultural or conservation uses.

Zoning and Densities within the Project Boundaries

For both Putnam and Clay Counties such uses have been established for the protection of agriculture as a major industry in the Counties by preventing encroachment on agricultural lands by incompatible uses; to encourage a broad range of agricultural activities and their accessory operations, including the processing and sale of agricultural products raised on the premises; to protect watersheds and water supplies, wilderness and scenic areas and conservation and wildlife areas; and to permit a variety of activities which require non-urban locations but which do not operate to the detriment of adjoining lands devoted to rural and agriculture purposes.

Existing Land Uses and Future Land Use Designations

Existing Land Uses: Nearly half of the project area is utilized for silviculture, reflecting the past and current land uses. 883 acres of the subject property are comprised of “Hydric Pine Flatwoods” – low, seasonally wet pine forests that drain into the St. Johns River. Additionally, over a third of the property (2,941 acres) is wetlands, which includes a variety of swamp types and wet prairie. There is a cell phone tower in the center of the parcel, which the landowners would intend to omit from a conservation easement. There are no other structures on the property.

Future Land Use Designation: The majority of the subject Clay County tract is comprised of the Agriculture FLUM category, with some smaller sections of Rural Residential mixed in. The entirety of the Putnam County tract is comprised of the Agriculture FLUM category. The Agriculture category for both Clay and Putnam Counties consists of areas used for cropland, pasture/rangeland, silviculture and other agricultural activities, vacant land, and some residential parcels of land. The majority of the site has been, and continues to function as, a timber farm. There are three parcels owned by Wetland Preserve LLC which are designated with the Industrial land use category by Putnam County, however, the sites are zoned Agricultural and have been used for timber farming apart from the construction of a cell phone tower which is not within the area of the subject site.

The maximum permitted residential density in the Clay County Agriculture FLUM category is 1 dwelling unit per 20 acres. The exact acreage for the sections designated Clay County Rural Residential is not specified by the County FLUM. The Rural Residential FLUM category allows a maximum permitted residential density of 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres. The maximum permitted residential density in the Putnam County Agriculture FLUM category is 1 dwelling unit per 10 acres.

Development Potential

Low Potential: The development potential of the property is low. With the current land use categories and zoning codes designated to the majority of the subject site being agriculturally based, and the past and present use of the subject site as a timber farm, development without significant changes to the land use categories or zoning districts for parcels within the subject site is unlikely.

Transportation Planning Issues

The proposed project is located in the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District 2 within Clay and Putnam Counties. U.S. Highway 17/State Road (SR) 15 runs approximately 10 miles perpendicular (north and south) along the western border of the entire project site, connecting directly three times in the southeasternmost corner. U.S. Highway 17/SR 15 is a designated evacuation route. An active Atlantic Coast rail main line travels for approximately 11 miles perpendicular (north and south) directly along the eastern border of the entire project site. There is also an active Atlantic Coast Mine Spur rail line that runs directly through the project parcel in the north for approximately 1 mile.

FDOT's Shared Use Non-Motorized Trail Network is located approximately 2.5 miles from the northernmost point of the project site for Orangedale to Mickler Trail. The entire project parcel is surrounded by more rural areas containing mostly smaller residential communities and industrial businesses. Three miles west over U.S. Highway 17/SR 15 of this project site starts a Florida Wildlife Corridor. While the property has little land adjacent to U.S. Highway 17/SR 15, and this stretch of road (although 4-lane with a divided median) demonstrates a lower priority for wildlife crossings than other such roads in this District for FDOT.

While FDOT finds no adverse impacts to the proposed project at this time, coordination with FDOT District 2 staff during the acquisition process is recommended to address any transportation system issues that may arise in the future and incorporate them into the management plan as appropriate.

Ongoing Governmental Efforts

The SJRWMD has committed to managing 2,635 acres of the project area as part of the adjacent J.P. Hall Bayard Point Conservation Area. The SJRWMD will partner with the FWC for the expansion of the Bayard Wildlife Management Area into the project area, if determined feasible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Staff in FDEP's DSL and the Florida Natural Areas Inventory determined the final project recommendations. Diana Pepe, Paige Kraker and Katie Ramirez in DSL's Office of Environmental Services were responsible for the overall coordination of this report, with contributions from the following:

- Division of Historical Resources: Brandon Ackermann
- Florida Forest Service: Cat Ingram, Lindsey Bessent, and Dylan Fay
- Florida Natural Areas Inventory: Geoff Parks and Kim Alexander
- Department of Commerce: Yazmin Valdez and David Pullin
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: Scotland Talley, Justin Ellenberger, Dean Cox, and Donna Marain
- DEP Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration: Moira Homann and Kenneth Weaver
- Florida Department of Transportation: Emily Rhodes
- St. Johns River Water Management District: Tyler Mosteller and Chris Kinslow

APPENDICES**Appendix A:**

Final FF measures table: Report requirement 259.105 (15)d, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

Putnam Clay Timberlands: Florida Forever Measures Evaluation 20260725

GIS ACRES = 6,977

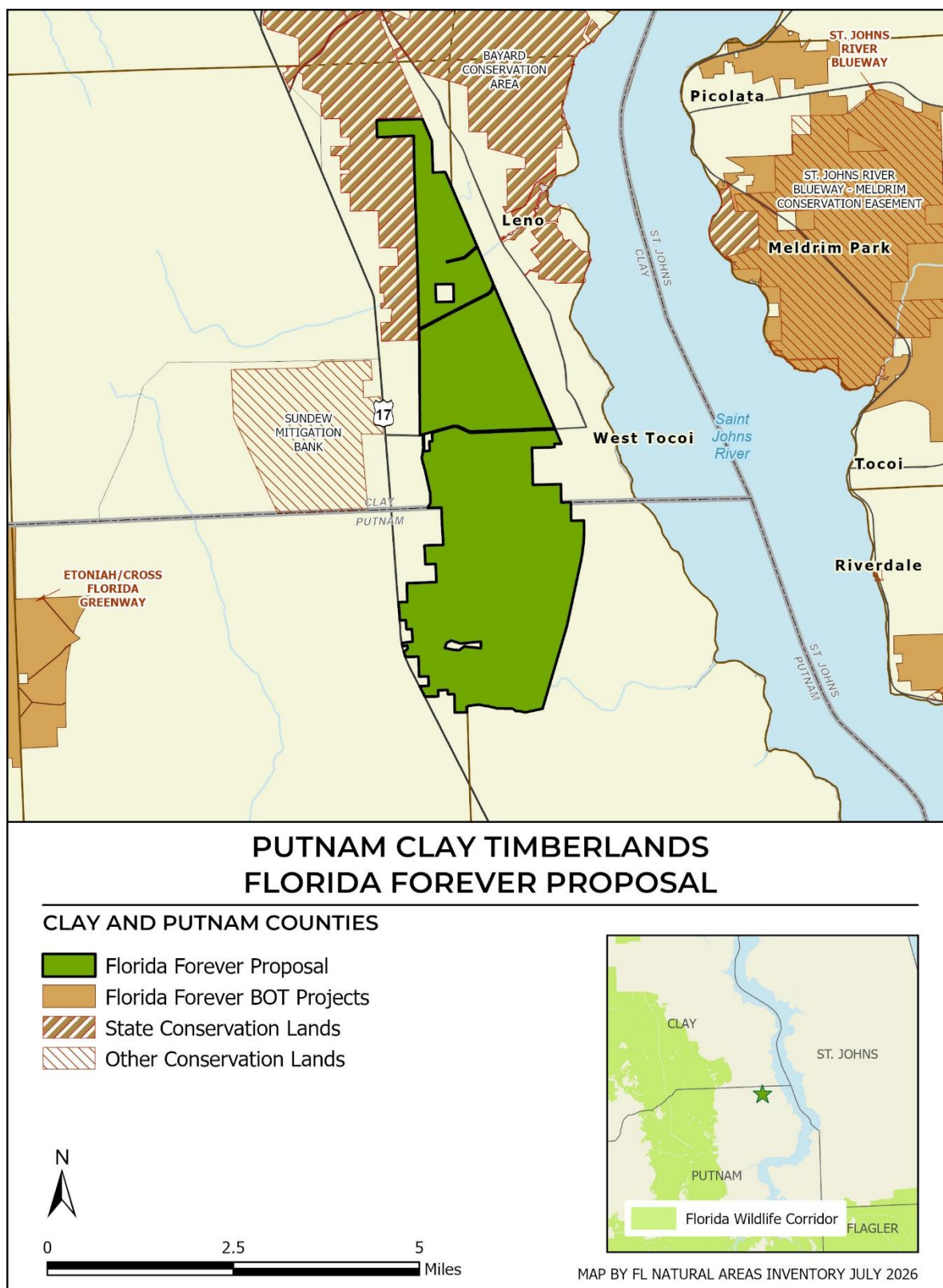
MEASURES	Resource Acres ¹	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	314	5%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	6,352	91%
Total Acres	6,666	96%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	2	< 1%
Priority 5	79	1%
Priority 6	1,767	25%
Total Acres	1,848	26%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	6,850	98%
Total Acres	6,850	98%
B4: Under-represented Natural Communities		
Upland Glade (G1)	0	0%
Pine Rockland (G1)	0	0%
Scrub and Scrubby Flatwoods (G2)	0	0%
Rockland Hammock (G2)	0	0%
Dry Prairie (G2)	0	0%
Seepage Slope (G2)	0	0%
Sandhill (G3)	0	0%
Sandhill Upland Lake (G3)	0	0%
Upland Pine (G3)	0	0%
Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4)	0	0%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	7	< 1%
Total Acres	7	< 1%
B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species		
G1	0	
G2	1	
G3	1	
G4	1	
G5	0	
Total	3	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	250	4%
Priority 3	858	12%
Priority 4	1,733	25%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	2,841	41%

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres ²	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	567	8%
Priority 3	2,041	29%
Priority 4	2,373	34%
Priority 5	1,949	28%
Priority 6	0	0%
Priority 7	43	< 1%
Total Acres	6,974	100%
C7: Fragile Coastal Resources		
Fragile Coastal Uplands	0	0%
Imperiled Coastal Lakes	0	0%
Coastal Wetlands	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
C8: Functional Wetlands		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	617	9%
Priority 3	1,069	15%
Priority 4	1,184	17%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	2,869	41%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	44	< 1%
Priority 3	149	2%
Priority 4	1,164	17%
Priority 5	3,096	44%
Priority 6	2,524	36%
Total Acres	6,977	100%
E2: Recreational Trails (miles)		
(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)		
Land Trail Priorities	0.0	
Land Trail Opportunities	2.0	
Total Miles	2.0	
F2: Arch. & Historical Sites (number)		
	1 sites	
G1: Sustainable Forestry		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	64	< 1%
Priority 3	720	10%
Priority 4	2,900	42%
Priority 5	1,097	16%
Total Acres	4,780	69%
G3: Forestland for Recharge		
	96	1%

¹Acres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted. This analysis converts site boundary into pixels, which causes slight differences from GIS acres; this effect is most noticeable on small sites.

Appendix B:

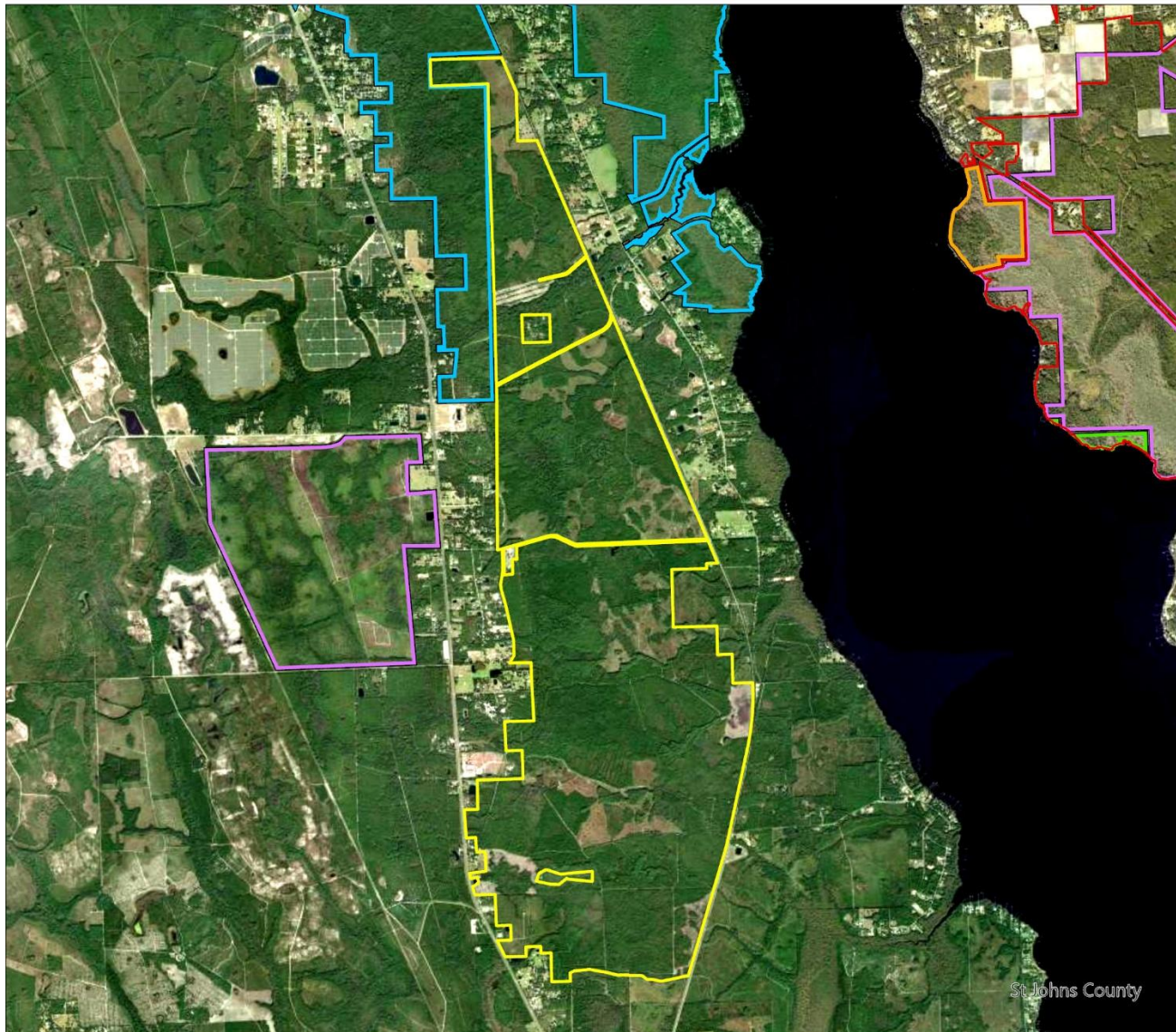
Final FF proposal boundary maps: Report requirement 259.105 (15)k, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

B1: Florida Forever map

B2: Aerial map

PUTNAM CLAY TIMBERLANDS FLORIDA FOREVER PROPOSAL

FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSAL BOUNDARY AS OF JULY 2026

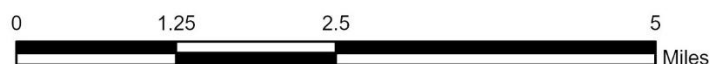


Map Produced by: FL Natural Areas Inventory, N. Pasco, July 2026

Background: Google Satellite Imagery 2025



- Florida Forever Proposal Boundary
- Florida Forever BOT Projects
- Existing State Conservation Lands
- Existing Water Management District Conservation Lands
- Existing Local Conservation Lands
- Existing Private Conservation Lands



Appendix C:
PROPERTY ID #'S FOR FINAL RECOMMENDED BOUNDARY

County	Parcel ID	Owner	Acres	Just (Market) Value	Parcel Designation
Putnam	01-08-26-0000-0010-0000	Three Steps Forest LLC	216.80	\$678,300.00	Essential
Putnam	05-08-27-0000-0030-0000	Three Steps Forest LLC	393.63	\$1,074,970	Essential
Putnam	06-08-27-0000-0010-0000	Three Steps Forest LLC	632.95	\$1,865,310	Essential
Putnam	07-08-27-0000-0010-0000	Three Steps Forest LLC	153.82	\$479,100	Essential
Putnam	07-08-27-0000-0020-0000	Three Steps Forest LLC	463.02	\$1,408,200	Essential
Putnam	08-08-27-0000-0020-0000	Three Steps Forest LLC	284.24	\$719,350	Essential
Putnam	12-08-26-0000-0010-0000	Three Steps Forest LLC	480.91	\$1,419,820	Essential
Putnam	13-08-26-0000-0040-0040	Three Steps Forest LLC	25.53	\$208,800	Essential
Putnam	17-08-27-0000-0020-0000	Three Steps Forest LLC	80.68	\$363,250	Essential
Putnam	18-08-27-0000-0020-0000	Three Steps Forest LLC	448.54	\$1,422,150	Essential
Clay	01-07-26-015735-000-00	Three Steps Forest LLC	94.78	\$940,226.00	Essential
Clay	07-07-27-016079-000-00	Three Steps Forest LLC	10.53	\$194,994	Essential
Clay	12-07-26-015872-000-00	Three Steps Forest LLC	224.65	\$1,443,026	Essential
Clay	13-07-26-015876-000-00	Three Steps Forest LLC	313.59	\$1,776,987	Essential
Clay	18-07-27-016085-000-00	Three Steps Forest LLC	209.33	\$1,300,986	Essential
Clay	19-07-27-016090-000-00	Three Steps Forest LLC	457.24	\$2,030,314	Essential
Clay	24-07-26-015965-000-00	Three Steps Forest LLC	264.06	\$1,576,988	Essential
Clay	25-07-26-015970-000-00	Three Steps Forest LLC	312.30	\$1,760,984	Essential
Clay	29-07-27-016100-000-00	Three Steps Forest LLC	79.60	\$800,990	Essential
Clay	30-07-27-016431-000-00	Three Steps Forest LLC	630.76	\$3,000,992	Essential
Clay	31-07-27-016434-000-00	Three Steps Forest LLC	630.67	\$2,781,598	Essential
Clay	32-07-27-016437-000-00	Three Steps Forest LLC	113.36	\$809,536	Essential
Clay	36-07-26-016021-000-00	Three Steps Forest LLC	264.15	\$1,524,909	Essential
Putnam	13-08-26-0000-0010-0000	Wetland Preserve LLC	166.58	\$546,060	Essential
Putnam	13-08-26-0000-0020-0000	Wetland Preserve LLC	10.12	\$120,000	Essential
Putnam	13-08-26-0000-0052-0000	Wetland Preserve LLC	15.65	\$183,600	Essential
		TOTAL	6,977.47	\$30,431,440	

Appendix D:

Management Prospectus for the Putnam Clay Timberlands, a fee simple proposal.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation CommissionProposed Manager

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is proposed as manager for the majority of the 6,793-acre Putnam Clay Timberlands property, specifically, the 4,245-acre portion located south of Decoy Road. The SJRWMD will manage the 2,635 acres north of Decoy Road as an addition to the J.P. Hall Bayard Point Conservation Area. There are also 184 acres proposed for less-than-fee acquisition in the southwestern area of the property.

Purpose and Scope

As stated in the Florida Forever application, Putnam Clay Timberlands meets many Florida Forever goals, performance measures, and criteria, as outlined in F.S. 259.105. Acquisition would help meet Florida Forever goals through increased protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels, protection of landscape linkages and conservation corridors, and provision of natural resource-focused public recreation opportunities. Furthermore, conservation of Putnam Clay Timberlands has the potential to protect, restore, and maintain the quality and natural functions of the land, water, and wetland systems necessary to ensure enough water is available for the current and future needs of natural systems and the citizens of the state.

If acquired, FWC would manage Putnam Clay Timberlands as part of the Wildlife Management Area (WMA) system to:

- conserve, protect, manage, or restore important ecosystems, landscapes, and forests in order to enhance or protect significant surface water, recreational, timber, and fish and wildlife resources;
- conserve and protect significant landscape-scale habitat and provide wildlife corridors for rare and imperiled species by increasing linkages and conservation corridors between public land and private conservation easements in the region;
- provide surface and groundwater protection and protect natural floodplain functions;
- provide opportunities for fish and wildlife-focused public outdoor recreation.

Qualifications for State Designation

The fee portion of the proposal would be established as part of the WMA system and would further FWC's mission to manage fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people by protecting habitat for fish and wildlife species, including imperiled and rare species, protecting surface waters, groundwater, and natural floodplain functions, and by providing the public with a variety of fish and wildlife-focused recreation opportunities.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

The property is managed for pine production and has a history of intensive silviculture since the 1960s, including the use of bedding throughout planted areas. There are scattered dome and basin swamps and several creek drainages with associated floodplain swamps and bottomland forests. Aerial imagery suggests that 15-35% of the property has not been used for silviculture, and this area is dominated by wooded wetlands. However, some alteration to presumed natural wet flatwood areas was observed during a property visit. This alteration was likely associated with harvest in these areas, so it is likely that more than 65% of the

property has been used for silviculture. In April and May 2026, most of these commercial timberlands burned in the Railroad Complex Wildfire. The timber operator is currently conducting salvage sales and replanting. Many acres remain bare as that process progresses, and many acres contain fire-damaged pre-merchantable stands.

Several non-damaged thinned planted pine areas retain at least some components of native herbaceous ground cover, some of which appear to have good native groundcover. There appears to be a low occurrence of invasive flora on the property. Establishing a prescribed fire program as the uplands recover from the wildfire will restore much of their historic value for wildlife.

Some ditching to connect the dome swamps to the creeks is evident, and the hydrological alteration appears to drain some wet flatwoods areas to facilitate timber production. Some of the smaller dome swamps may have been harvested to some extent, but the larger domes and the creek bottoms appear to be mostly intact. Some hydrologic restoration may be needed to allow for the dome swamps to recover full ecological function.

Restoration of natural communities will be a long-term process but would provide wildlife habitat for many species, including game species, imperiled species, and wide-ranging species benefitting from the expansion of existing conservation lands into a more functional conservation corridor. The road system on the property is adequate. It is currently in poor condition due to the salvage logging, but with improvement will provide good access for public recreation.

Quantified vegetation management objectives will be developed. The ten-year management plan will outline short-term and long-term actions for natural community restoration that will improve wildlife habitat. These actions may include flattening timber beds, removing burn salvage debris piles, applying prescribed fire at intervals appropriate for each community type, treatment of invasive plant species, establishing longleaf pine, and hydrological restoration.

Management Implementation, Public Access, Site Security, and Protection of Infrastructure

After the property is leased to FWC, a Management Plan will be developed within one year that describes the management goals and objectives necessary to implement resource management programs on Putnam Clay Timberlands. Goals will address general wildlife habitat management; imperiled species habitat restoration and management, or population restoration; species monitoring; invasive species management; public access and recreational opportunities; hydrological restoration; forest resource management; cultural resources protection; facilities and infrastructure; and partnerships or collaborative management opportunities. Short-term and long-term objectives will be developed to address these goals.

Essential roads will be maintained to provide public access and management operations. Unnecessary roads and hydrological disturbances will be abandoned or restored as practical. Infrastructure development will be limited to only that which is necessary to allow public access and to provide for the necessary facilities, security, and management of the property.

Revenue-Generating Potential

Revenue could include sales of various permits and recreational user fees, and ecotourism activities if such projects could be economically developed. Area regulations would be developed to identify the necessary and required permits, fees, and regulations. Timber sales from thinning operations and restoration of former pine plantations may yield additional

revenue. Apiary leases will be considered as a revenue source depending on whether the area meets the criteria of the FWC's Apiary Policy. Additionally, acquisition would provide long-term value from ecosystem services that benefit local and regional land and water resources, and from a variety of additional property attributes and potential uses associated with human health and economic benefits.

Potential Multiple-Use Activities

Following acquisition, FWC will consider implementing multiple fish and wildlife-focused recreational uses through the Commission approval process as needed and following planning considerations. The ten-year management plan will identify approved and conditional multiple use activities that will provide access and compatible recreation while protecting the resources.

Cooperators in Management Activities

FWC will cooperate with other agencies as needed to achieve management goals and objectives. The SJRWMD will be a primary partner considering they lead manage J.P. Hall Bayard Point WMA, in a cooperative partnership with FWC. The FWC will also partner with the Division of Historical Resources to ensure cultural resources are protected during management activities, and with the Florida Forest Service to provide technical assistance on forest resource management.

Preliminary Cost Estimates

The initial non-recurring (first year only) start-up cost is estimated to be \$679,000, which includes public access, infrastructure, and fixed capital outlays necessary for management of the area. Below is an estimate of the recurring annual operating costs to operate and manage the property. Optimal management of the area would require two full-time equivalent positions. Salary requirements for the full-time equivalent positions, and costs to operate and manage the proposed lands are reflected in the cost estimate below. All land management funding is dependent upon annual legislative appropriations.

	Recurring
Resource Management	\$163,000
Capital Improvements	\$25,000
Visitor Services/ Recreation	\$16,000
Support	\$46,000
Administration	\$4,000
TOTAL	\$254,000

St. Johns River Water Management District

Proposed Manager

The St. Johns River Water Management District will be the lead manager on approximately 2,635 acres of the Putnam-Clay Timberlands Florida Forever Project, adjacent to the SJRWMD-managed J.P. Hall Bayard Point Conservation Area (BCA) in Clay County (Figure 1). This Project builds upon existing conservation lands to preserve ecologically valuable forest land in a portion of the State that is experiencing rapid population growth.

This Management Prospectus is not a complete land management plan for the project site; it serves as the framework for a more detailed and developed management plan as required upon acquisition.

If the proposal is approved, the SJRWMD-managed portion of the property will be incorporated into the BCA land management plan while a plan update is being developed to include the proposed project.

Purpose and Scope

The acquisition of the Putnam Clay Timberland's approximately 7,000 acres is a strategic opportunity to secure a critical stretch of the river corridor, buffer the existing BCA, and ensure the ecological and hydrological integrity of this landscape is not permanently compromised by near-term development. The portions of the proposal to be managed by the SJRWMD are to be acquired full fee by the State. The Project will also include public recreation opportunities similar to what is currently offered on BCA.

The proposed project is a large undeveloped landscape with two "willing seller" landowners – a rarity in this part of the State. The project encompasses thousands of acres of pine woodlands and forests. Furthermore, over a third of the property contains a variety of wetlands, including hardwood and cypress swamps, and freshwater marshes. These wetlands are important for water and floodplain protection along the Upper St. Johns River.

Qualifications for State Designation

The Putnam Clay Timberlands proposal is located within the SJRWMD's optimal boundary for BCA and is on the potential acquisition list. It would provide additional access to difficult areas within BCA. In addition, it would provide significant protection for numerous wetlands and streams that feed into the St. Johns River (Figure 2). Through acquisition, the property would aid the SJRWMD in achieving its core missions of improving water quality and quantity, increasing nature-based flood protection, and allow for the maintenance and restoration of Florida's natural systems.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

The conditions that would affect the SJRWMD's management of the project are not uncommon for land managers in Florida. The long-term impacts from several decades of intensive silviculture have altered plant communities that may need ecological restoration and/or enhancement. Wildland fuel loads have built up due to fire exclusion. Invasive species coverage appears to be low, and where populations are present, they are in close proximity to disturbed areas such as roads and railroad tracks. The southern portion of the Project was significantly impacted by the Railroad Wildfire that occurred in April 2026 (Figure 3). Reforestation efforts would be undertaken by the SJRWMD, if acquired. Monitoring for invasive species in the wildfire area is needed.

Management Implementation, Public Access, Site Security, and Protection of Infrastructure

The Putnam Clay Timberlands would follow the general goals and objectives of the BCA land management plan, which would be updated to include the project. These include:

- Evaluating need for hydrologic restoration
- Evaluating opportunities for prescribed fire or fire surrogate application
- Designing fire management units for effort tracking
- Rehabilitating suppression firelines
- Assessing needs for ecosystem restoration and enhancement
- Evaluating reforestation needs
- Conducting property-wide timber inventory

- Surveying and treating invasive species
- Evaluating public access points
- At the direction of the FWC, evaluating the incorporation of the project into a Wildlife Management Area
- Conducting cultural resource reconnaissance
- Conducting boundary marking and gate repair/replacement
- Conducting necessary road infrastructure repairs for management needs

Most of these efforts would be accomplished in the short term (two-year) timeframe but all would continue into the long-term timeframe. Regional SJRWMD land management staff would manage the project from the regional office located on BCA.

Revenue-Generating Potential

The greatest revenue-generating potential is from timber harvest. The SJRWMD has conducted timber stand improvements using thinning and clearcut/replanting harvest methods for more than 30 years on SJRWMD-managed lands. These efforts on the proposed project would be in accordance with the timber management activities currently being conducted on BCA. These efforts are integral in the restoration and management of a SJRWMD conservation area. The SJRWMD estimates an average of \$480 per acre of timber revenue on the Project, based on 40 tons per acre harvested during a first thinning, using 2026 Quarter 2 per ton pulpwood pricing provided by TimberMart-South. A more accurate estimate will be provided once a timber inventory of the property is complete. An additional revenue-generating activity that would be appropriate for the project is an apiary lease; the SJRWMD may enter into leases if determined practicable and in the best interest of land management activities.

Potential Multiple-Use Activities

The potential of the Putnam Clay Timberlands to accommodate multiple uses was analyzed in accordance with subsection 253.034(5), F.S. The project would be managed under the multiple-use concept. Timber harvesting, invasive plant and animal management, prescribed burning, and wildland fuels treatments, all as part of natural community management and restoration activities, can be accomplished in a manner that does not interfere with the primary purpose of conservation. Extraction of mineral resources is incompatible with the conservation purpose of the property.

Recreation opportunities would be developed during the scope of this plan. These opportunities would include hiking, biking, and horseback riding on trails within the property. Any recreational developments would occur to avoid disturbing the integrity of the ecosystems on the proposed project.

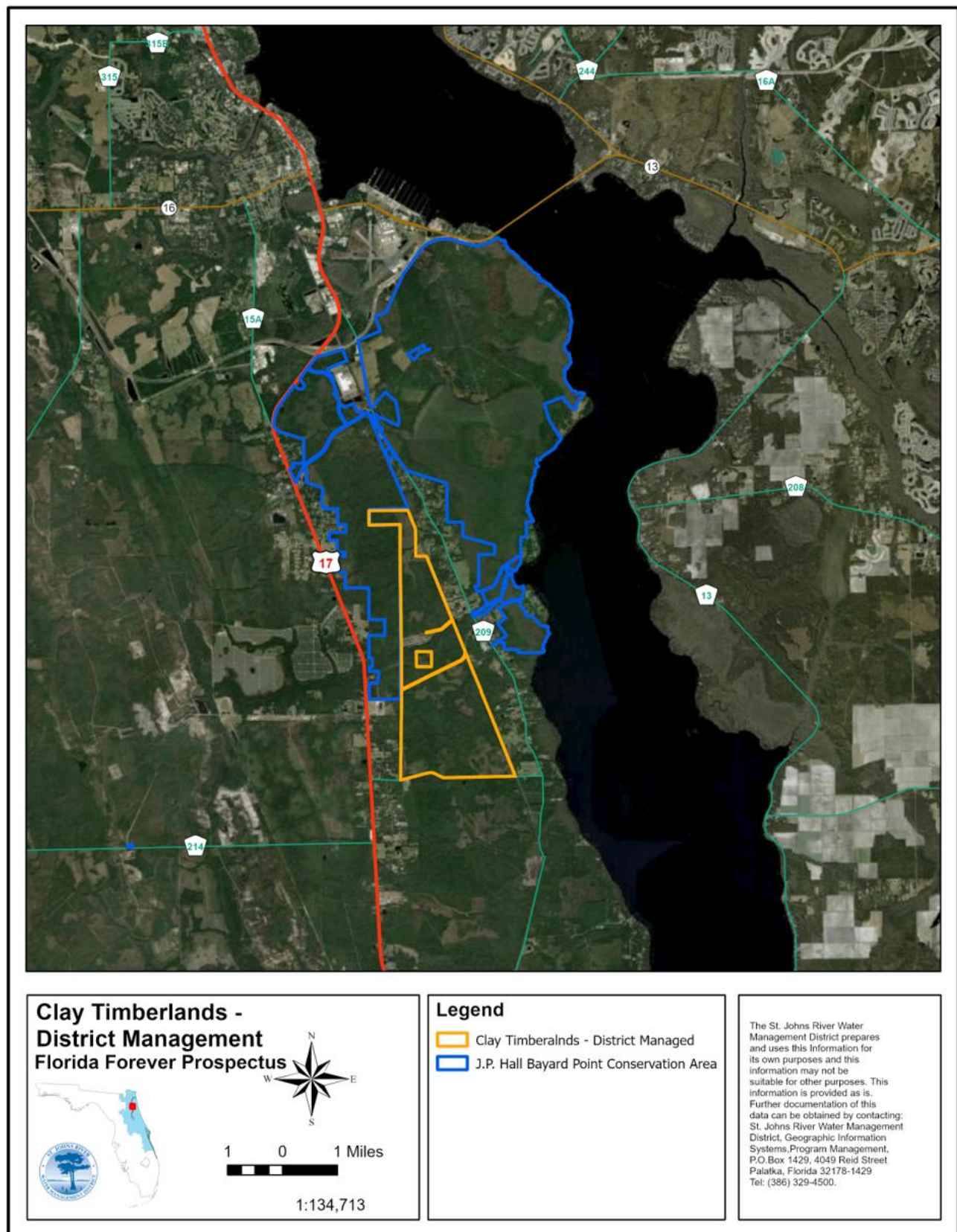
Cooperators in Management Activities

The SJRWMD would be the lead agency for the resource management of the property. District cooperates with the Division of Historic Resources regarding the management of cultural resources. The SJRWMD cooperates with the FWC regarding the management of wildlife resources. The SJRWMD cooperates with the FWC and the Clay County Sheriff's Office for law enforcement.

Preliminary Cost Estimates

	Startup	Recurring (10-year planning period)
Source	(CARL, Florida Forever, legislative appropriation, etc.)	
Salary (#FTE)	\$70,000 (including benefits)	\$70,000 (including benefits)
OPS (# of OPS)	\$0	\$0
Resource Management	\$103,175	\$103,175
Capital Improvements	\$0	\$0
Visitor Services/Recreation	\$5,000	\$1,500/annually
Support	\$10,000	\$10,000/annually
Administration	\$1,000	\$1,000/annually
TOTAL	\$189,175	\$185,675

Figure 1



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Figure 2

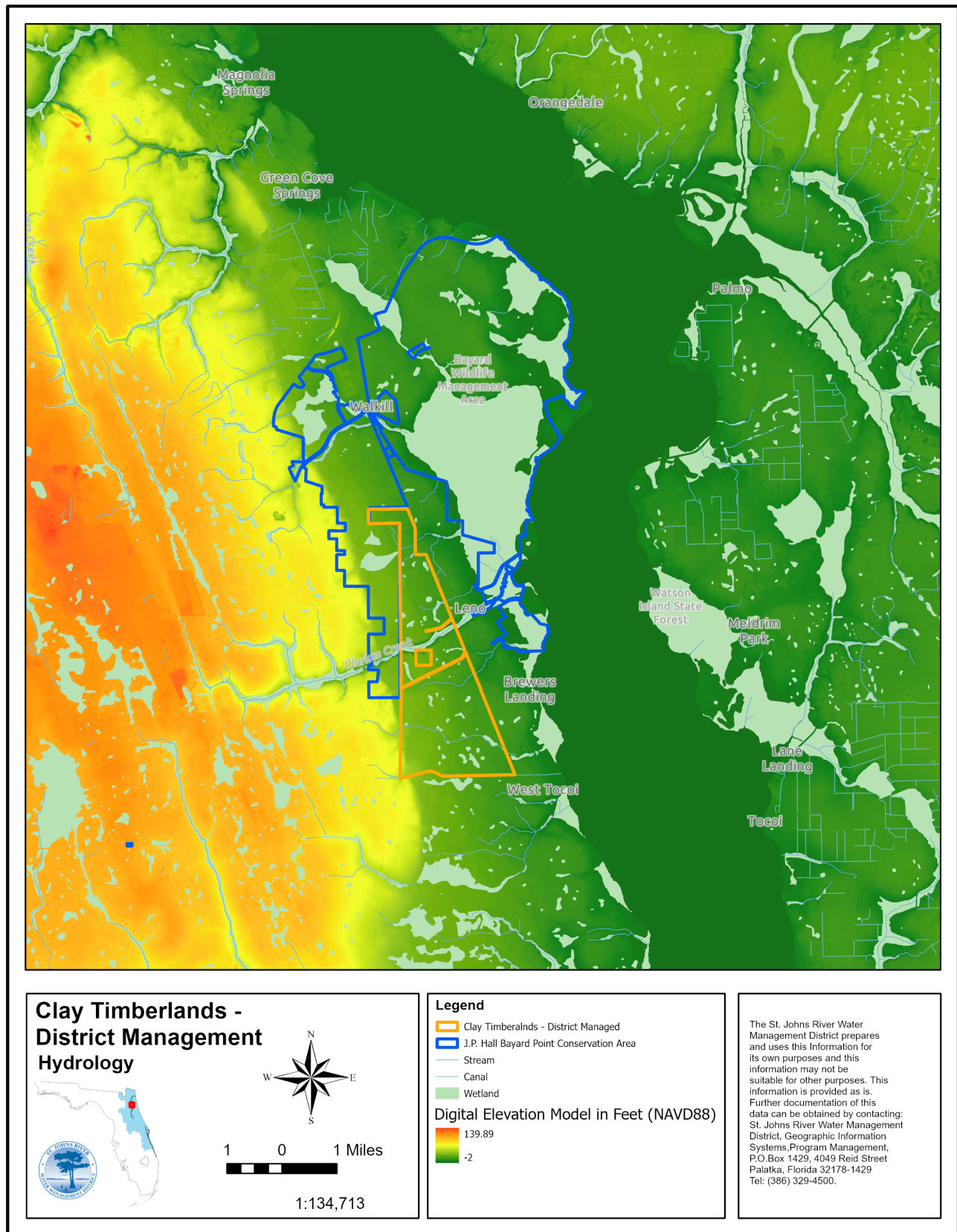
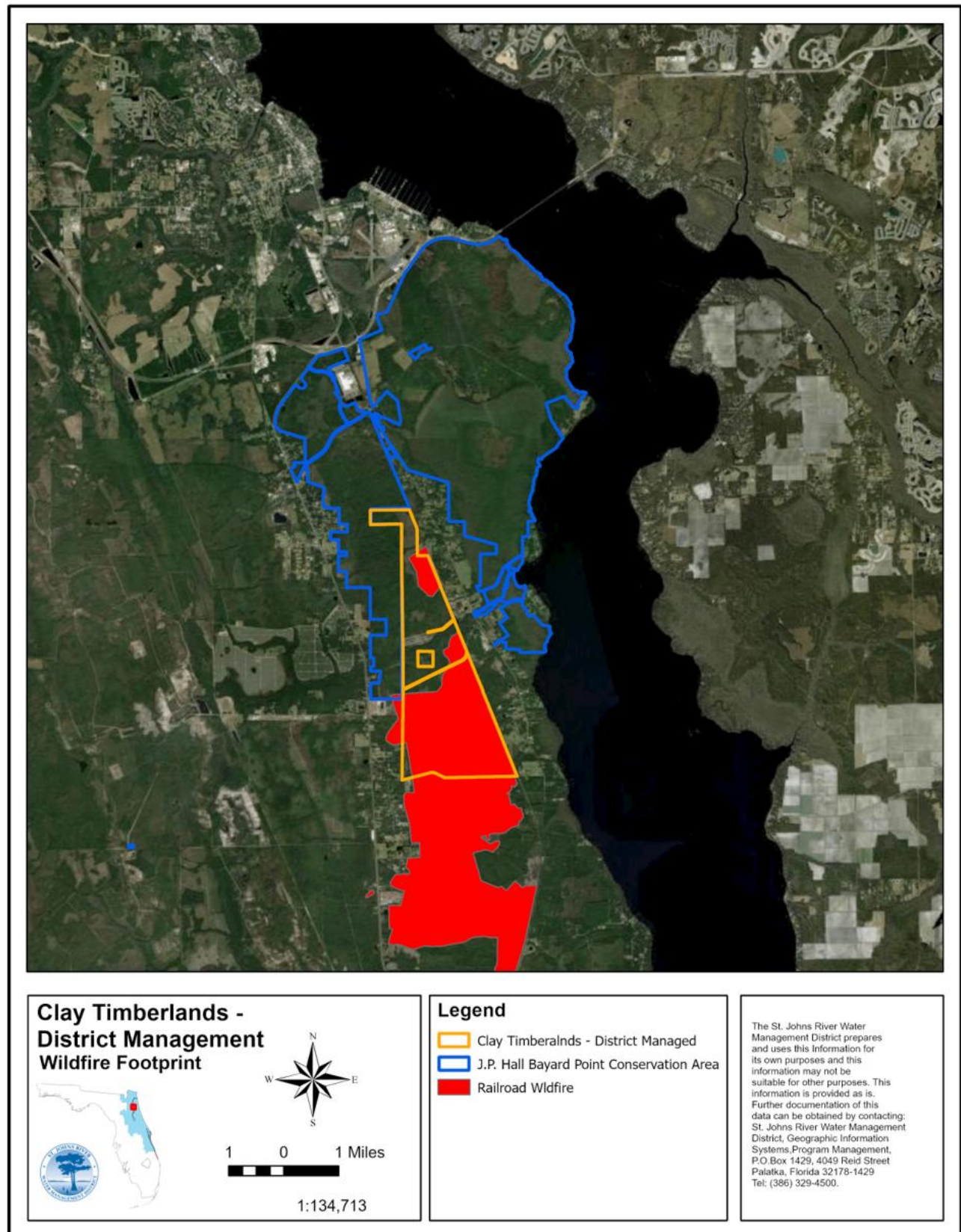


Figure 3



Appendix E:*Imperiled Species FNAI Ranking Definitions***FNAI GLOBAL ELEMENT RANK**

- G1** = Critically imperiled globally because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- G2** = Imperiled globally because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- G3** = Either very rare and local throughout its range (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.
- G4** = Apparently secure globally (may be rare in parts of range).
- G5** = Demonstrably secure globally.
- GH** = Of historical occurrence throughout its range, may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).
- GX** = Believed to be extinct throughout range.
- GXC** = Extirpated from the wild but still known from captivity or cultivation.
- G#?** = Tentative rank (e.g., G2?).
- G#G#** = Range of rank; insufficient data to assign specific global rank (e.g., G2G3).
- G#T#** = Rank of a taxonomic subgroup such as a subspecies or variety; the G portion of the rank refers to the entire species and the T portion refers to the specific subgroup; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G3T1).
- G#Q** = Rank of questionable species - ranked as species but questionable whether it is species or subspecies; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G2Q).
- G#T#Q** = Same as above, but validity as subspecies or variety is questioned.
- GU** = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned (e.g., GUT2).
- GNA** = Ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).
- GNR** = Element not yet ranked (temporary).
- GNRTR** = Neither the element nor the taxonomic subgroup has yet been ranked.

FNAI STATE ELEMENT RANK

- S1** = Critically imperiled in Florida because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- S2** = Imperiled in Florida because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.
- S3** = Either very rare and local in Florida (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.
- S4** = Apparently secure in Florida (may be rare in parts of range).
- S5** = Demonstrably secure in Florida.
- SH** = Of historical occurrence in Florida, possibly extirpated, but may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).
- SX** = Believed to be extirpated throughout Florida.
- SU** = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned.
- SNA** = State ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).
- SNR** = Element not yet ranked (temporary).

Appendix F:
Site Visit Photos



Florida black bear tracks



Recently burned timber stand



Clarkes Creek



Road through the property



Florida Forever Project Evaluation Report

Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension Columbia County



Acquisition Type: Less-Than-Fee or Fee Simple

Acres: 5,051

Just Value: \$12,668,142

Application Date: April 15, 2026

Project Sponsors: Saunders Real Estate

Prepared By:

Division of State Lands

Office of Environmental Services



Submitted to the Acquisition and Restoration Council

October 9, 2026

Executive Summary

The Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension Florida Forever proposal contains 15 parcels owned by Rayonier Forest Resources LP, totaling approximately 5,051 acres in Columbia County. The property is proposed for either fee simple acquisition to be managed by the Florida Forest Service (FFS) as a part of the John M. Bethea State Forest, or as less-than-fee acquisition. The proposal has a tax assessed value of \$12,668,142.

The proposal shares over 2.5 miles of its western boundary with a conserved portion of the existing Raiford to Osceola Florida Forever project. The property is currently an active silviculture operation. As such, much of the proposal's uplands have been converted to pine plantation, totaling about 69% of the total project area. The planted pine consists of unthinned, bedded stands of loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) and slash pine (*P. elliottii*). The most common natural community type found on the project is basin swamp, found largely along drainages throughout the site. These swamps have been affected by past logging and timber operations. The canopy of the basin swamps are dominated by pond cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*) and occasional slash pine.

The proposal contains the headwaters of Olustee Creek, which flows to the Santa Fe River, and eventually the Suwannee River. The creek originates in the east and runs south, flowing west around the property's lower boundary. Additionally, the property lies within the Eastern Water Supply Planning Area, the Santa Fe Basin Management Action Plan, and the Ichetucknee and Devil's Ear Springshed. Overall, conservation of the proposed project would help to protect surface and ground water resources.

A majority of the property (86%) lies within Priority 1 of the Florida Wildlife Corridor, which is designed to protect linkage corridors for rare, imperiled, and long-ranging species. Additionally, Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*) and gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) have been documented on site. With restoration by the FFS, the Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension proposal would further expand quality habitat for protected species and extend linkages between conservation lands.

This proposed project would contribute to a large network of conservation lands including; the Camp Blanding to Raiford Greenway Florida Forever project, Raiford to Osceola Florida Forever project, Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park, the Osceola National Forest, Osceola Wildlife Management Area, Pinhook Swamp Florida Forever project and John M. Bethea State Forest. As an addition to the John M. Bethea State Forest, the proposed project would expand opportunities for outdoor public recreation and aid in the management of adjacent protected lands.

If approved for addition to the 2027 Florida Forever Priority List, the proposal should be considered as an addition to the Raiford to Osceola Greenway project in the Less-Than-Fee category. All ±5,051 acres proposed for acquisition are considered essential due to the resources documented on the property (see Appendix C). An interagency team conducted a site visit on June 17, 2026. Information included in this project evaluation report is a result of this site visit.

PURPOSE FOR ACQUISITION

If acquired, the Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension proposal would contribute to an existing network of conservation lands spanning from Camp Blanding Military Reservation, the Osceola National Forest, and the John M. Bethea State Forest. The project will help protect habitat connectivity for rare, imperiled and long-ranging species, such as the Florida black bear and the headwaters of Olustee Creek, a tributary of the Santa Fe and Suwannee River.

Acquisition of this property would meet the following Florida Forever Goals, Criteria and Priorities:

Goal	Criteria		Priority	
A ☒	(a) ☒	(h) ☐	(a) ☐	(h) ☒
B ☒	(b) ☒	(i) ☐	(b) ☐	
C ☒	(c) ☐	(j) ☐	(c) ☒	
D ☒	(d) ☒	(k) ☒	(d) ☒	
E ☒	(e) ☐	(l) ☒	(e) ☒	
F ☒	(f) ☒		(f) ☐	
G ☒	(g) ☐		(g) ☐	
H ☐				
I ☐				

*Projects proposed to be funded pursuant to Section 259.105(3)(b), F.S., must meet at least one of the criteria outlined under Section 259.105(9), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0021, F.A.C., and shall meet at least two of the Florida Forever goals and measures outlined in Section 259.105(4), F.S., and further described in Rule 18-24.0022, F.A.C.

LOCATION AND PROXIMITY TO OTHER MANAGED AREAS

The Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension proposal includes ca. 5,051 acres in Columbia County. It consists of an irregularly shaped block of contiguous properties, with one additional small block connected corner-to-corner to the main tract. The property is proposed for fee simple acquisition to be managed by the FFS as part of the John M. Bethea State Forest, or as a less-than-fee acquisition.

The proposal is situated ca. 4 miles east of Lake City and about 6 miles south of I-10 in eastern Columbia County, adjacent to the boundaries of Union and Baker counties. The property extends about 4.5 miles north to south and is about 3 miles east to west at its widest point. Via over 2.5 miles of shared boundary with the Weyerhaeuser Conservation Easement to its east, the proposal is connected to a corridor of protected land extending from Osceola National Forest (2 miles north) eastward to Camp Blanding. Portions of the Raiford to Osceola

Greenway, the nearest unacquired Florida Forever project lands, are less than 1.5 miles to the east; unacquired lands in the Pinhook Swamp Florida Forever project are about 7 miles northwest.

RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

Florida Natural Areas Inventory

This evaluation is based on information gathered from the proposal, field observations, aerial photography, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5' topographic maps, Cooperative Land Cover data (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission [FWC] and Florida Natural Areas Inventory [FNAI], Florida Cooperative Land Cover Map, version 4.0, the FNAI Natural Heritage database and other publicly available GIS data sources. A field survey was conducted on June 17, 2026, by the Acquisition and Restoration Council liaison staff, including FNAI biologists Gwen Iacona and Jenna Annis.

The property is in an area of moderate elevation containing a portion of the headwaters of Olustee Creek, a tributary of the Suwannee River that originates just east of the proposal and flows southward, curving west around the proposal's lower edge. Drainage is generally eastward and southward across the property. Elevations descend across the gently undulating terrain from a maximum of ca. 160 feet above sea level near the northern end of the proposal to ca. 115-120 feet along Olustee Creek.

The property is currently used for timber production, with nearly all of the uplands (ca. 69% of the site) converted to pine plantation. These plantations consist of mostly unthinned, bedded stands of loblolly pine and slash pine over weedy herbs such as purple bluestem (*Andropogon cretaceus*), dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*) and Carolina redroot (*Lachnanthes caroliniana*), and remnant flatwoods vegetation, including gallberry (*Ilex glabra*), fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*) and saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*).

About 20% of the proposal consists of relatively undisturbed natural vegetation, mostly occupied by sinuous forested drainages that meander throughout most of the property and connect to Olustee Creek. Basin swamps comprise most of these forested drainages (about 8% of the property). Some of these swamps have been impacted by past cypress logging. The closed canopy is dominated by pond cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*) with occasional slash pine throughout. The sparse subcanopy includes red maple (*Acer rubrum*), myrtle-leaved holly (*Ilex myrtifolia*) and swamp tupelo (*Nyssa biflora*). The shrub and herb layers are typically sparse, except where past logging has opened up the canopy. Typical shrubs include young canopy and subcanopy species, along with common buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), swamp doghobble (*Eubotrys racemosus*) fetterbush and southern bayberry (*Morella cerifera*). Herbs include Virginia chain fern (*Anchistea virginica*), clustered sedge (*Carex glaucescens*), sugarcane plumegrass (*Erianthus giganteus*), flattened pipewort (*Eriocaulon compressum*), rush (*Juncus* sp.), netted chain fern (*Lorinseria areolata*), royal fern (*Osmunda spectabilis*) and rosy camphorweed (*Pluchea baccharis*). Occasional epiphytes include resurrection fern (*Pleopeltis michauxiana*) and Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*).

Bottomland forests also occupy a portion of the forested drainages (about 3% of the property) on site. This community intermixes frequently with floodplain swamp and the two are very difficult to distinguish from each other on aerial photography without extensive ground-truthing. The ground-truthed bottomland forest on the property has a closed, mixed canopy of swamp laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*), swamp tupelo and bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*).

Subcanopy species include red maple and ash (*Fraxinus* sp.). Shrubs are moderate and include common buttonbush, swamp doghobble and southern bayberry. Sparse herbs include flatsedge (*Cyperus* sp.) and lizard's tail (*Saururus cernuus*). Occasional vines include trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*).

Floodplain swamp occurs primarily in the central portion of the property and connects directly to Olustee Creek just off property to the east. The closed canopy is dominated by bald cypress, with occasional red maple, sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) and blackgum (*Nyssa sylvatica*). Scattered shrubs include titi (*Cyrilla racemiflora*), fetterbush and Elliott's blueberry (*Vaccinium elliotii*). Herbs include woodoats (*Chasmanthium* sp.) and witchgrasses (*Dichanthelium* spp.).

Dome swamps dot the landscape throughout most of the property and comprise about 3% of the acreage. The closed canopy consists of pond cypress with occasional slash pine. Occasional subcanopy species include red maple, sweetbay (*Magnolia virginiana* var. *australis*) and swamp tupelo. The shrub layer forms a dense, often impenetrable thicket of fetterbush interlaced with laurel greenbrier (*Smilax laurifolia*). Less common shrubs include red maple, myrtle-leaved holly and southern bayberry. Herbs are sparse and include Virginia chain fern.

A few remnant patches of wet flatwoods occur throughout the property, mostly as thin transitional edges between swamps and pine plantations. The canopy is dominated by dense stands of slash pine. The subcanopy includes scattered red maple, myrtle-leaved holly, sweetbay, swamp tupelo and pond cypress. Shrubs are moderate to dense with gallberry, myrtle-leaved holly, fetterbush and occasional saw palmetto. Virginia chain fern is an occasional herb. Spanish moss and Earleaf greenbrier (*Smilax auriculata*) are occasional epiphytes and vines.

Small, scattered baygalls occur throughout the northern half of the property, making up less than 1% of the total acreage. Most of these baygalls are isolated depressions dotting the upland (now pine plantation) landscape. The canopy and subcanopy is dense with loblolly bay (*Gordonia lasianthus*) and occasional pond cypress. The shrub layer is dense with young loblolly bay and titi. Virginia chain fern is a sparse herb. Muscadine (*Muscadinia rotundifolia*) and laurel greenbrier are commonly twining through the shrub layer.

Approximately 8% of the property is mapped as successional hydric shrubland/forest. These areas are mostly former swamps that have undergone severe hydrological and/or structural changes due to cypress harvesting or other silvicultural activities. The canopy may be open or closed with red maple swamp tupelo, slash pine and/or pond cypress. The subcanopy and shrub layers are not well defined and often form a dense thicket, consisting of titi, loblolly bay, dahoon (*Ilex cassine*), myrtle-leaved holly, fetterbush, sweetbay, southern bayberry, water oak, swamp bay (*Tamala palustris*) and blueberry (*Vaccinium* sp.). Herbs may be sparse to dense, depending on canopy and shrub cover. Herb species include clustered sedge, Walter's sedge (*Carex striata* var. *striata*), woodoats, netted chain fern, cinnamon fern (*Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*) and toothed midsorus fern (*Telmatoblechnum serrulatum*). Vines are frequent and include laurel greenbrier and eastern poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans* var. *radicans*).

Very small patches of successional hardwood forest are mapped throughout the property, totaling less than 1% of the total acreage. Most of these hardwood forests are along the

property boundary. These areas along the boundary were not visited and were delineated based on current aerial photography. One 2-acre patch of former basin swamp was mapped as successional hardwood forest based on the site visit. The area has a mixed closed canopy of blackgum, slash pine and swamp laurel oak. The shrub layer is dominated by saw palmetto, with occasional common buttonbush, titi, fetterbush and southern bayberry. Occasional herbs include cinnamon fern. Vines are common and include muscadine and eastern poison ivy.

Numerous logging roads traverse the site, covering about 3% of the total acreage. A utility corridor (1% of total acreage) runs through the lower half of the site, running through pine plantation, small wetlands and eventually cutting across Olustee Creek at the site's southeastern boundary. A few artificial ponds, borrow areas, clearings, developed areas and improved pastures together occupy less than 1% of the site.

Invasive plants are uncommon throughout the property. Two observations of Japanese climbing fern (*Lygodium japonicum*) were made in basin swamp and bottomland forest, near roadside ditches. Chinese tallow tree (*Triadica sebifera*) was observed in pine plantation along the roadside.

Table 1. Natural communities and landcover types within Florida Forever proposal

Community or Landcover	Acres	Percent of Proposal
basin swamp	415	8
dome swamp	167	3
bottomland forest	146	3
floodplain swamp	105	2
wet flatwoods	61	1
baygall	25	<1
pine plantation	3,499	69
successional hydric shrubland/forest	419	8
road	137	3
utility corridor	56	1
successional hardwood forest	8	<1
borrow area	6	<1
clearing/regeneration	2	<1
developed	2	<1
pasture-improved	1	<1
artificial pond	<1	<1
Total	5,051	100

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

This summary provides an assessment of fish and wildlife resources associated with the Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension Florida Forever proposal based on field observations during the June 17, 2026, site visit, and on associated GIS analysis and review of species population and status resources.

Although the forested woodland understory was on the sparse side, some areas had a fair amount of mature hardwood diversity. Uplands and wetter areas included in silviculture were heavily bedded and apparently sprayed. Most understory and any midstory was primarily brushy oaks, but some saw palmetto and common native shrub species were present in some areas, such as wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*), gallberry, sand blackberry (*Rubus cuneifolius*) and fetterbush. Few invasive plant species were observed, a small infestation of Japanese climbing

fern and widely scattered Chinese tallow. Feral pig (*Sus scrofa*) damage was evident in several areas.

A few active and potentially active State Threatened gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) burrows were observed in a powerline right-of-way adjacent to a primary gravel road. No other imperiled species were noted. Other wildlife species observed were turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), northern parula (*Setophaga americana*), common yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*), eastern towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*), white-eyed vireo (*Vireo griseus*), and northern cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*).

The FWC Florida Landscape Assessment Model mean score for the proposal is 6.2 (on a 0–10 increasing value scale). The proposal contains designated FWC Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (SHCAs) for four species of varying conservation priority. This includes Priority 2 SHCA (on a 1-5 scale of decreasing priority) for two species: 111 acres for the short-tailed hawk (*Buteo brachyurus*; state Species of Greatest Conservation Need) and 70 acres for the state Threatened striped newt (*Notophthalmus perstriatus*). This also includes 28 acres of Priority 3 SHCA for the Florida mouse (*Peromyscus floridanus*; Species of Greatest Conservation Need). Finally, this includes 3,662 acres of Priority 5 SHCA for the Florida black bear, and FWC monitoring indicates the property is frequent bear range. Potential habitat was observed for all these SHCA species except the striped newt – it is possible that some isolated areas have appropriate seasonal water bodies, but associated necessary upland habitat does not appear to occur on the property.

In conclusion, acquisition of the Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension will expand existing protected lands and provide wildlife habitat. This would benefit a variety of common wildlife species, including wide-ranging species such as bears. Conservation would also increase floodplain protection.

GOALS, MEASURES AND CRITERIA

GOAL A:

ENHANCE THE COORDINATION AND COMPLETION OF LAND ACQUISITION PROJECTS

Measure A1:

The number of acres acquired through the state's land acquisition programs that contribute to the enhancement of essential natural resources, ecosystem service parcels, and connecting linkage corridors as identified and developed by the best available scientific data.

If acquired, all 5,051 acres would contribute to ecosystem service parcels and connecting linkage corridors.

Measure A3:

The number of shared acquisition projects among Florida Forever funding partners and partners with other funding sources, including local governments and the federal government.

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GOAL B:

INCREASE THE PROTECTION OF FLORIDA'S BIODIVERSITY AT THE SPECIES, NATURAL COMMUNITY, AND LANDSCAPE LEVELS

Measure B1:

The number of acres acquired of significant Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas.

The SHCA Florida Forever Conservation Needs layer identifies important remaining habitat conservation needs for 62 terrestrial vertebrates on private lands. Priority 1 and 2 represent habitat for species considered imperiled or critically imperiled in Florida. The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation (FFME) table (Appendix B) reports the site contains approximately 4,534 acres (90% of site) of Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas. This is divided between Priority 3 (75% of site) and Priority 5 (14%) areas.

Measure B2:

The number of acres acquired of highest priority conservation areas for Florida's rarest species.

Habitat conservation priorities for 634 of Florida's rarest species were mapped and divided into six priority classes. The FFME reports the proposed project contains approximately 1,671 acres (33% of site) of rare species habitat. The habitat is mostly divided between Priority 5 (20% of site) and Priority 6 (13%), with the remainder in Priority 4 (less than 1%).

The following table lists the acres of habitat for each species that may be found on the site, based on the FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities. Please note that habitats for these species overlap, so that the sum total of habitat for all species is more than the total acreage of the priority conservation areas. Acreage for aquatic species includes a terrestrial buffer.

Table 2. Rare species habitat based on FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	Acres
<i>Macrochelys suwanniensis</i>	Suwannee alligator snapping turtle	G2	997
<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	Florida sandhill crane	G5T2	136
<i>Mycteria americana</i>	wood stork	G4	768

See Appendix E for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

Measure B3:

The number of acres acquired of significant landscapes, landscape linkages, and conservation corridors, giving priority to completing linkages.

The FFME reports approximately 4,983 acres (99%) of the proposed project contribute to protection of ecological greenways with 86% of the site falling within Priority 1 areas, 12% in Priority 4 areas, and less than 1% in Priority 5 areas. Prioritization is based on such factors as importance for wide-ranging species like Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*) and Florida black bear, importance for maintaining a connected reserve network, and riparian corridors.

Measure B4:

The number of acres acquired of under-represented native ecosystems.

The Florida Forever natural community analysis includes only those communities that are under-represented on existing conservation lands. This analysis provides a conservative estimate of the extent of these communities, because it identifies only relatively undisturbed portions of these communities that occur within their historic range. The FFME table lists the acreages of under-represented natural communities found on the site. Based on this analysis, the Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension proposal contains 61 acres of wet flatwoods (1% of site).

Measure B5:

The number of landscape-sized protection areas of at least 50,000 acres that exhibit a mosaic of predominantly intact or restorable natural communities established through new acquisition projects, or augmentations to previous projects.

The Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension proposal would contribute to a contiguous landscape-sized protection area of at least 50,000 acres as it adjoins the recently acquired Weyerhaeuser Conservation Easement, which in turn adjoins Osceola National Forest.

Measure B6:

The percentage increase in the number of occurrences of imperiled species on publicly managed conservation areas.

The commercially exploited royal fern (G5, S5, N, N) was observed in basin swamp on the southern half of the property. One active gopher tortoise burrow (G3, S3, N, LT) was observed in the southern half of the property, along a roadside, surrounded by pine plantation. Florida black bear (G5T4, S4, N, N) has been documented previously on the property.

Rarity rankings listed above are in the following order: FNAI global (G, T) and state (S) ranks, federal status, state status.

The FFME table lists the number of Element Occurrences by Global Rank (G-rank) that are found on the proposal. Note that the number of occurrences does not necessarily match the number of species in the following table because a) some species may have more than one occurrence on the proposal site, or b) some species observed on site do not meet the criteria for addition to the FNAI database at this time. The table below contains species falling into any of these observational categories, species gleaned from other sources (e.g., Florida Breeding Bird Atlas) with different degrees of locational precision, and species reported in the application or during the site visit.

Table 3. Rare plants and animals documented or reported to occur within the proposed project

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	State Rank	Federal Status	State Status
Rare plants documented on site					
<i>Osmunda spectabilis</i>	royal fern	G5 ⁺	S5	N	N
Additional rare plants reported on site by applicant					
none					
Rare animals documented on site					
<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>	gopher tortoise	G3	S3	N	LT
<i>Ursus americanus floridanus</i>	Florida black bear	G5T4	S4	N	N
Additional rare animals reported on site by applicant					
none					

See Appendix E for imperiled species FNAI ranking definitions.

‡Species not tracked by FNAI

GOAL C:

PROTECT, RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE QUALITY OF NATURAL FUNCTIONS OF LAND, WATER, AND WETLAND SYSTEMS OF THE STATE

Measure C1:

The number of acres of publicly-owned land identified as needing restoration; enhancement, and management, acres undergoing restoration or enhancement; acres with restoration activities completed, and acres managed to maintain such restored or enhanced conditions; the number of acres which represent actual or potential imperiled species habitat; the number of acres which are available pursuant to a management plan to restore, enhance, repopulate, and manage imperiled species habitat; and the number of acres of imperiled species habitat managed, restored, and enhanced, repopulated, or acquired.

The approximately 415 acres of basin swamp, 146 acres of bottomland forest and 105 acres of floodplain swamp are in fair to good ecological condition. Former swamps with significant disturbance from silvicultural activities are classified as successional hydric forest or shrubland (419 acres). These areas still have some complement of native species and, depending on the extent of bedding and planting of pines, may require less or more effort to restore them to a naturally functioning wetland. If fire is re-introduced into the uplands, it should be allowed to extinguish naturally at these swamp edges. The small, isolated patches of baygall (25 acres), dome swamp (167 acres) and wet flatwoods (61 acres) are in poor to fair condition. Most of the remnant baygall and dome swamps are isolated within dense pine plantation and have developed a dense, often impenetrable shrub layer from the lack of fire in the surrounding uplands. Remnant wet flatwoods tend to have a dense slash pine canopy that has led to heavy pine litter and low herbaceous diversity. Most of the extensive pine plantations (3,499 acres) are planted densely and are heavily bedded with little remaining native groundcover. Re-introduction of fire would require extensive pine thinning and re-establishing groundcover species, particularly southern wiregrass (*Aristida beyrichiana*).

Invasive plant control needs of the property appear to be relatively minor; there were few invasive species noted during the site visit, and most were seen in isolated locations.

Measure C3:

The percentage completion of targeted capital improvements in surface water improvement and management plans created under s. 373.453 (2), regional or master stormwater management system plans, or other adopted restoration plans.

There are no Suwannee River Water Management District owned permits, capital improvements in surface water improvement and management plans, regional or master management system plans or adopted restoration plans known at this time for this site.

Measure C4:

The number of acres acquired that protect natural floodplain functions.

The FFME reports approximately 2,997 acres (59%) of the proposed project may contribute to the protection of natural floodplain function. This area is divided between Priority 4 (40% of site) and Priority 3 (19%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C5:

The number of acres acquired that protect surface waters of the State.

The FFME reports that approximately 4,983 acres (99%) of the proposed project could provide protection for those surface waters of the State that currently remain in good condition. This area is divided between Priority 4 (46% of site), Priority 2 (24%), Priority 5 (17%), Priority 3 (8%) and Priority 6 (4%). These areas represent acreage that contributes to the protection of state-designated Outstanding Florida Waters, springs, rare fish habitat or other surface waters.

Measure C8:

The number of acres of functional wetland systems protected.

The FFME reports that approximately 1,350 acres (27%) of the proposed project would provide protection for functional wetland systems. This area is divided between Priority 3 (19% of site) and Priority 4 (8%). Priority 1 areas are the most natural with the lowest intensity land uses.

Measure C11:

The number of acres of public conservation lands in which upland invasive, exotic plants are under maintenance control.

Zero acres of upland invasive plant species are currently targeted for control. Targeted treatment of those species would cover approximately 3,600 acres of the property once acquired by the State of Florida.

GOAL D:

ENSURE THAT SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES OF WATER ARE AVAILABLE TO MEET THE CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF NATURAL SYSTEMS AND THE CITIZENS OF THE STATE

Measure D1:

The number of acres acquired which provide retention and storage of surface water in naturally occurring storage areas, such as lakes and wetlands, consistent with the maintenance of water resources or water supplies and consistent with district water supply plans.

This site is an extremely large area, approximately 5,051 acres, comprised of multiple parcels in eastern Columbia County. The entire site is within the Santa Fe River Watershed, more specifically the Olustee Creek Watershed, the Ichetucknee and Devil's Ear Springshed, the Eastern Water Supply Planning Area and the Santa Fe Basin Management Action Plan. The site does not have any wells, however there are 16 Environmental Resource Permits within the boundaries of the site including a borrow pit. Immediately adjacent to the northwest of the property, is the North Florida Mega Industrial Park. There are natural resources present (wetlands) such that protecting the site may provide additional long-term benefits. Most of the site is within Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Zone AE. The site is within the study area of the FEMA flood map revisions that are ongoing. Water improvement projects would only increase the ability of the site to achieve additional storage. An evaluation of the National Wetlands Inventory Map determined that approximately 28% of the site is wetlands. An evaluation of the FEMA flood maps determined that approximately 62% of the site is flood plain. Olustee Creek and/or tributaries flow through the property.

Measure D3:

The number of acres acquired of groundwater recharge areas critical to springs, sinks, aquifers, other natural systems, or water supply.

The FFME reports approximately 5,048 acres (100%) of the proposed project would provide protection for groundwater recharge areas. This area is divided between Priority 4 (49% of site), Priority 3 (46%), and Priority 5 (5%). Prioritization is based on features that contribute to aquifer vulnerability such as swallets, thickness of the intermediate aquifer confining unit and

closed topographical depressions, as well as areas within springshed protection zones and in proximity to public water supply wells.

Table 4. Spatial Analysis for Potential Water Quality Benefits of the Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension

Categories	Scoring Criteria	Project Score
FDEP High Profile Springs (In 1,2,3 or > spring sheds)	12, 24, 36	24
FDEP Select Agricultural Land Use (0-30%, >30-65%, >65%)	4,8,12	
FDEP Florida Aquifer Vulnerability (FAVA)	4,7,10	7
FDEP Special Nutrient Impaired WBIDs	9	
FDEP Distance to Major Lakes (100, 500, 1000 meters)	8,7,6	
FDEP Springsheds or within 5 miles	10, 7	10
FDEP BMAPs	10	10
FDEP Distance to Major Rivers (100, 500, 1000 meters)	6,5,4	
Total Possible	101	51

GIS Evaluation score is converted to a 1 to 5 value (low to high)

FINAL DEAR SCORE = 4, medium high water quality protection benefits

GOAL E:

INCREASE NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED PUBLIC RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Measure E1:

The number of acres acquired that are available for natural resource-based public recreation or education.

Approximately 5,000 acres are available to offer new natural resource-based public recreation/education opportunities, if acquired as fee simple.

Measure E2:

The miles of trails that are available for public recreation, giving priority to those that provide significant connections including those that will assist in completing the Florida National Scenic Trail.

The FFME reports that 4.3 miles of the land trail priorities and opportunities identified by the Florida Greenways and Trails System Plan (2023 update) come within a quarter mile of the proposal.

Measure E3:

The number of new resource-based recreation facilities, by type, made available on public land.

There are no recreational facilities currently onsite. This property could support an education/welcome center, two primitive campgrounds, three day-use areas and two parking areas if acquired as fee simple.

GOAL F:

PRESERVE SIGNIFICANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL OR HISTORIC SITES

Measure F1:

The increase in the number of and percentage of historic and archaeological properties listed in the Florida Master Site File or National Register of Historic Places which are protected or preserved for public use.

The Raiford to Ocala Greenway Extension Florida Forever proposal contains multiple cultural resources listed in the Florida Master Site File or National Register of Historic Places.

Measure F2:

The increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in state ownership.
If acquired as fee simple, acquisition of the Raiford to Osceola Florida Forever proposal would meet Measure F2, as it would result in an increase in the number and percentage of historic and archaeological properties that are in state ownership.

CULTURAL RESOURCES:

According to the Division of Historical Resource's (DHR) Florida Master Site File, there are six recorded archaeological sites within the boundary of the Raiford to Ocala Greenway Extension. While none of the recorded sites have yielded extensive diagnostic materials or are well-defined, they collectively represent at least 3,000 years of human occupation. One site (CO00338) is believed to be the location of an early 20th century homestead.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS:

DHR staff observed all visited sites to be in maintenance condition. There is potential for unrecorded resources. Should any artifacts or other cultural resources be discovered on the property in the future, DHR recommends leaving them in place and contacting DHR's Public Lands Archaeology Program for further evaluation.

GOAL G:

INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF FORESTLAND AVAILABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Measure G1:

The number of acres acquired that are available for sustainable forest management.

The FFME reports approximately 3,522 acres (70% of site) could be available for sustainable forest management, divided between Priority 4 (1,683 acres), Priority 3 (1,478 acres), Priority 2 (272 acres), Priority 5 (46 acres) and Priority 1 (43 acres). Prioritization is based on eight criteria set by the Florida Forest Service: whether trees are natural or planted, size of tract, distance to market, average total height that dominant and codominant pine trees obtain, access/operability, burn frequency, years since last burn and landscape integrity.

Measure G2:

The number of acres of state-owned forestland managed for economic return in accordance with current best management practices.

There are 3,575 acres of planted slash pine that may be managed for economic return in accordance with Best Management Practices once purchased by the State.

CRITERIA

The proposed project meets the following Florida Forever criteria (§ 259.105, F.S.)

- (9) (a) The project meets multiple goals described in subsection (4).
- (b) The project is part of an ongoing governmental effort to restore, protect, or develop land areas or water resources.
- (c) The project enhances or facilitates management of properties already under public ownership.
- (d) The project has significant archaeological or historic value.
- (f) The project contributes to the solution of water resource problems on a regional basis.

- (k) The project may be acquired, in whole or in part, using alternatives to fee simple, including but not limited to, tax incentives, mitigation funds, or other revenues; the purchase of development rights, hunting rights, agricultural or silvicultural rights, or mineral rights; or obtaining conservation easements or flowage easements.
- (10) The Acquisition and Restoration Council shall give increased priority to:
 - (c) projects that can be acquired in less than fee ownership, such as a permanent conservation easement;
 - (d) projects that contribute to improving the quality and quantity of surface water and groundwater;
 - (e) projects that contribute to improving the water quality and flow of springs;
 - (h) projects located within the Florida Wildlife Corridor

MANAGEMENT

See Appendix D for the management prospectus.

FUNDING SOURCES

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

FUNDING FOR MAPPING, APPRAISAL, NEGOTIATIONS & CLOSING

Florida Forever is the only identified funding source.

OWNERSHIP PATTERN AND ACQUISITION PLANNING

Title and Legal Access Issues, Jurisdictional and Sovereignty Lands, Legal Issues

Record of title, a designation of jurisdictional and sovereignty lands and any other legal issues will be determined at the time of acquisition and are not known at this time.

Known Encumbrances (easement, long-term leases, restrictive covenants, etc.)

The easements and encumbrances of record would be determined during the appraisal mapping. A current title commitment would be obtained, or the owner's title insurance policy would be depicted or noted on the appraisal map.

Description and location of hazardous waste sites, dumps, borrow pits

There are no apparent contamination sites within the project based on the application form.

Estimated Cost of Appraisal and Mapping

FDEP Bureau of Appraisal estimates \$10,000 to \$20,000 in appraisal fees.

Acquisition Phases

Subject to funding, the Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension Florida Forever proposal will be phased based upon price.

GOVERNMENT PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT**Contribution to Recreation and Open Space Needs**

The proposal has a moderate potential for contributing to recreation and open space needs based on continued use of the property for ecotourism, agritourism, or hunting leases managed by the landowners.

The property remains largely undeveloped and functions as for contiguous silviculture. Existing interior roads and management infrastructure support forestry operations and land stewardship activities. The combination of active timber management and low-intensity recreational use allows the property to remain economically viable while retaining its rural character and natural resource values. Continued management of the tract as a working forest supports the local agricultural economy, preserves traditional land uses in Columbia County, and helps prevent fragmentation or conversion to incompatible uses in a sensitive river corridor landscape.

Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Spaces

Moderate Potential: Given the overall potential for subdivision, conversion, and/or development, the property would be at a moderate risk of losing significant contiguous upland and wetland habitats. The property is predominantly upland (approximately 74%) with roughly 26% wetlands interspersed throughout the tract. The property is characterized by gently rolling topography typical of North Florida's timberlands. Upland areas are dominated by actively managed pine plantations at varying stages of rotation, with natural regeneration areas and scattered hardwood inclusions. Soils such as Olustee-Pelham complex, Sapelo fine sand, and Pelham fine sand support commercial timber production while also contributing to groundwater recharge functions. Wetland systems include forested wetlands, hydric pine flatwoods, and baygall communities associated with low-lying drainage features. These wetlands are integrated throughout the tract and contribute to flood attenuation, surface water storage, and water quality protection. Portions of the property fall within FEMA-designated flood zones, reflecting its role in regional drainage patterns. Mesic flatwoods are the dominant natural community, with smaller areas of sandhill and wetland systems providing habitat diversity at the landscape scale.

The tract supports a range of native wildlife species typical of managed forest systems in this region. According to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory Biodiversity Matrix, the property provides potential habitat for species of conservation concern including Florida black bear, red-cockaded woodpecker, eastern indigo snake, gopher tortoise, bald eagle, and osprey. The mosaic of pine plantation, natural flatwoods, and forested wetlands provides travel corridors and foraging habitat for wide-ranging species while maintaining the economic productivity of the working forest.

While North Florida river corridors are known to contain archaeological resources, there are no known recorded archaeological sites within the project boundary at this time. Any future ground-disturbing activities would be subject to standard review procedures to ensure protection of cultural resources, if identified.

Potential for Being Subdivided

Moderate Potential: The potential for subdivision or conversion to other uses is moderate. The application states that under current zoning and future land use designations, the tract could be subdivided into rural residential parcels or converted to more intensive uses. Incremental fragmentation into homesites would disrupt active timber management, reduce the economic

viability of forestry operations, and permanently alter the landscape. In addition, the size and configuration of the property, combined with existing transmission infrastructure in the region, create potential for future utility-scale solar development. Such uses would significantly impact wildlife habitat connectivity, wetland integrity, aquifer recharge areas, and natural floodplain function.

Zoning and Densities within the Project Boundaries

The property is currently zoned “Agriculture-1” Space Residential generally refers to a development approach that integrates residential uses with significant open space preservation or provision. Under this type of zoning or land use designation, residential development is planned in a way that dedicates a portion of the site for natural features, green space, recreation, or low-impact areas rather than solely focusing on building lots. The intent is to balance housing with environmental stewardship, promote connectivity of green areas, and retain community character by ensuring that homes are clustered or designed around preserved open space rather than sprawling across the entire parcel. In practice, this can mean reduced lot sizes in exchange for shared or protected open areas, scenic buffers, and design standards that emphasize pedestrian access, public amenities, or environmental conservation in residential neighborhoods.

Existing Land Uses and Future Land Use Designations

Existing Land Uses: Most of the subject property is utilized for silviculture (approximately 3,100 acres) land use/land cover designation. Forested wetlands, floodplain forest, basin swamp, and baygalls are present along creeks and drainage features that flow from the property. These systems play an important role in maintaining regional hydrology by supporting groundwater recharge, moderating stormwater runoff, and preserving natural floodplain function. Protection of the tract would help safeguard these forested wetland systems and maintain water quality within the surrounding watershed, which ultimately contributes to the larger regional river systems in North Florida. The property is located in a region of Columbia County with a long history of timber production and rural land use.

Future Land Use Designation: The subject property is designated as “Agriculture-1” on the Columbia County Comprehensive Plan FLUM. Based on the Columbia County FLUM category, Agriculture-1 which is predominantly used for crop cultivation, livestock, specialty farms, and silviculture activities. The maximum residential density permitted for this FLUM category is one dwelling unit per 20 acres. The subject property has a residential development potential of approximately 253 dwelling units.

Development Potential

Moderate Potential: The development potential for the property is moderate. According to the application, the property is currently managed as a working forest and remains largely undeveloped. However, the surrounding region of Columbia County is experiencing increasing growth pressure associated with expansion from Lake City and the greater Jacksonville area. While the property is presently designated for agricultural use, its size, road access, and proximity to existing residential areas create long-term development potential.

Without protection, conversion to residential or commercial uses may fragment an important linkage within the Ocala-to-Osceola Wildlife Corridor and diminish its role as a buffer to adjacent conservation lands. Placement of a conservation easement on the property would

eliminate these development pressures, ensure the long-term continuation of silvicultural operations, and preserve the tracts natural resource values and landscape-scale connectivity.

Transportation Planning Issues

The proposed project is located in the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District 2, completely within Columbia County, except for a half mile section in the southeasternmost corner located in Union County. A majority of the roadways near this project are located within rural areas dominated by agricultural and natural habitats. State Road (SR) 100 runs nearby, ranging from 500 feet to 2.5 miles at times. U.S. Highway 90/SR 10 runs east to west approximately 5 miles north, and an active Norfolk Southern rail main line is less than 3 miles to the north and less than 4 miles west from the site, all of which are Strategic Intermodal System facilities. SR 100 and U.S. Highway 90/SR10 are both designated evacuation routes.

An unfunded gap of FDOT's Shared Use Non-Motorized Trail Network is located approximately 5 miles north along U.S. Highway 90/SR 10. A partially funding gap for pre-construction of the Palatka to Lake City Shared Use Non-Motorized Trail Network is located along SR 100 which runs near the proposal site, ranging from 500 feet to 2.5 miles in proximity. The entire proposal is surrounded by the Florida Wildlife Corridor but still presents a low priority for a wildlife crossing because this area is all east of SR 10.

While FDOT finds no adverse impacts to the proposed project at this time, coordination with FDOT District 2 staff during the acquisition process is recommended to address any transportation system issues that may arise in the future and incorporate them into the management plan as appropriate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Staff in FDEP's DSL and the Florida Natural Areas Inventory determined the final project recommendations. Diana Pepe, Sine Murray, and Katie Ramirez in DSL's Office of Environmental Services were responsible for the overall coordination of this report, with contributions from the following:

- Division of Historical Resources: Nick Yarbrough
- Florida Forest Services: Cat Ingram and Eric Deprez
- Florida Natural Areas Inventory: Gwen Iacona and Jenna Annis
- Department of Commerce: Yazmin Valdez and David Pullin
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: Dean Cox and Joe Vaughn
- DEP Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration: Moira Homann and Kenneth Weaver
- Florida Department of Transportation: Emily Rhodes
- Suwannee River Water Management District: Scott Gregor

APPENDICES**Appendix A:**

Final FF measures table: Report requirement 259.105 (15)d, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension: Florida Forever Measures Evaluation 20260725

GIS ACRES = 5,051

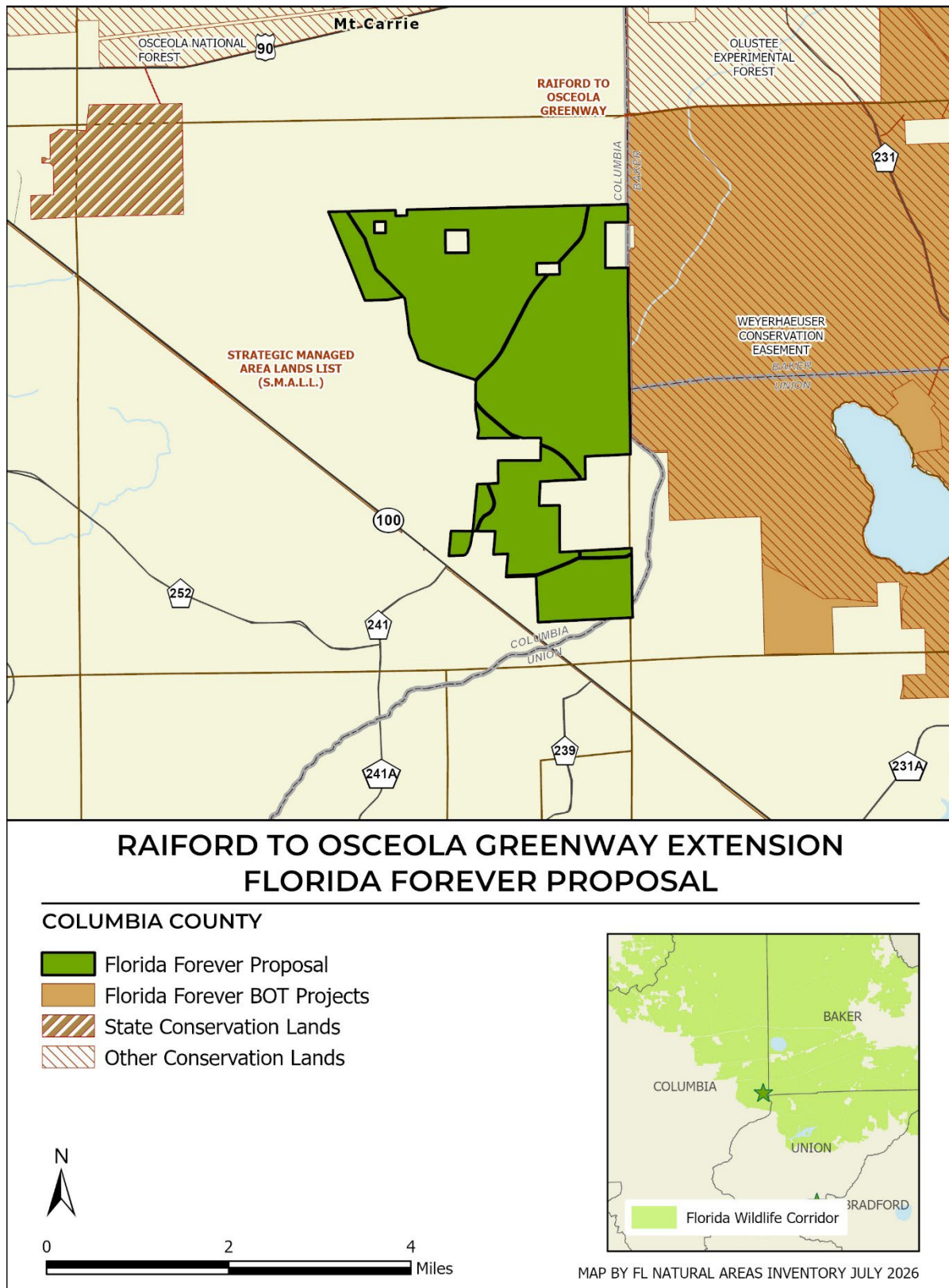
MEASURES	Resource Acres ²	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	3,810	75%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	724	14%
Total Acres	4,534	90%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	1	< 1%
Priority 5	993	20%
Priority 6	677	13%
Total Acres	1,671	33%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	4,353	86%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	600	12%
Priority 5	31	< 1%
Total Acres	4,983	99%
B4: Under-represented Natural Communities		
Upland Glade (G1)	0	0%
Pine Rockland (G1)	0	0%
Scrub and Scrubby Flatwoods (G2)	0	0%
Rockland Hammock (G2)	0	0%
Dry Prairie (G2)	0	0%
Seepage Slope (G2)	0	0%
Sandhill (G3)	0	0%
Sandhill Upland Lake (G3)	0	0%
Upland Pine (G3)	0	0%
Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4)	61	1%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	0	0%
Total Acres	61	1%
B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species		
G1	0	
G2	0	
G3	0	
G4	1	
G5	0	
Total	1	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	967	19%
Priority 4	2,030	40%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	2,997	59%

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres ²	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	1,213	24%
Priority 3	398	8%
Priority 4	2,314	46%
Priority 5	859	17%
Priority 6	199	4%
Priority 7	0	0%
Total Acres	4,983	99%
C7: Fragile Coastal Resources		
Fragile Coastal Uplands	0	0%
Imperiled Coastal Lakes	0	0%
Coastal Wetlands	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
C8: Functional Wetlands		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	953	19%
Priority 4	397	8%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	1,350	27%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	2,315	46%
Priority 4	2,470	49%
Priority 5	263	5%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	5,048	100%
E2: Recreational Trails (miles)		
(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)		
Land Trail Priorities	4.3	
Land Trail Opportunities	0.0	
Total Miles	4.3	
F2: Arch. & Historical Sites (number)	6 sites	
G1: Sustainable Forestry		
Priority 1	43	< 1%
Priority 2	272	5%
Priority 3	1,478	29%
Priority 4	1,683	33%
Priority 5	46	< 1%
Total Acres	3,522	70%
G3: Forestland for Recharge	1,672	33%

*Acres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted. This analysis converts site boundary into pixels, which causes slight differences from GIS acres; this effect is most noticeable on small sites.

Appendix B:

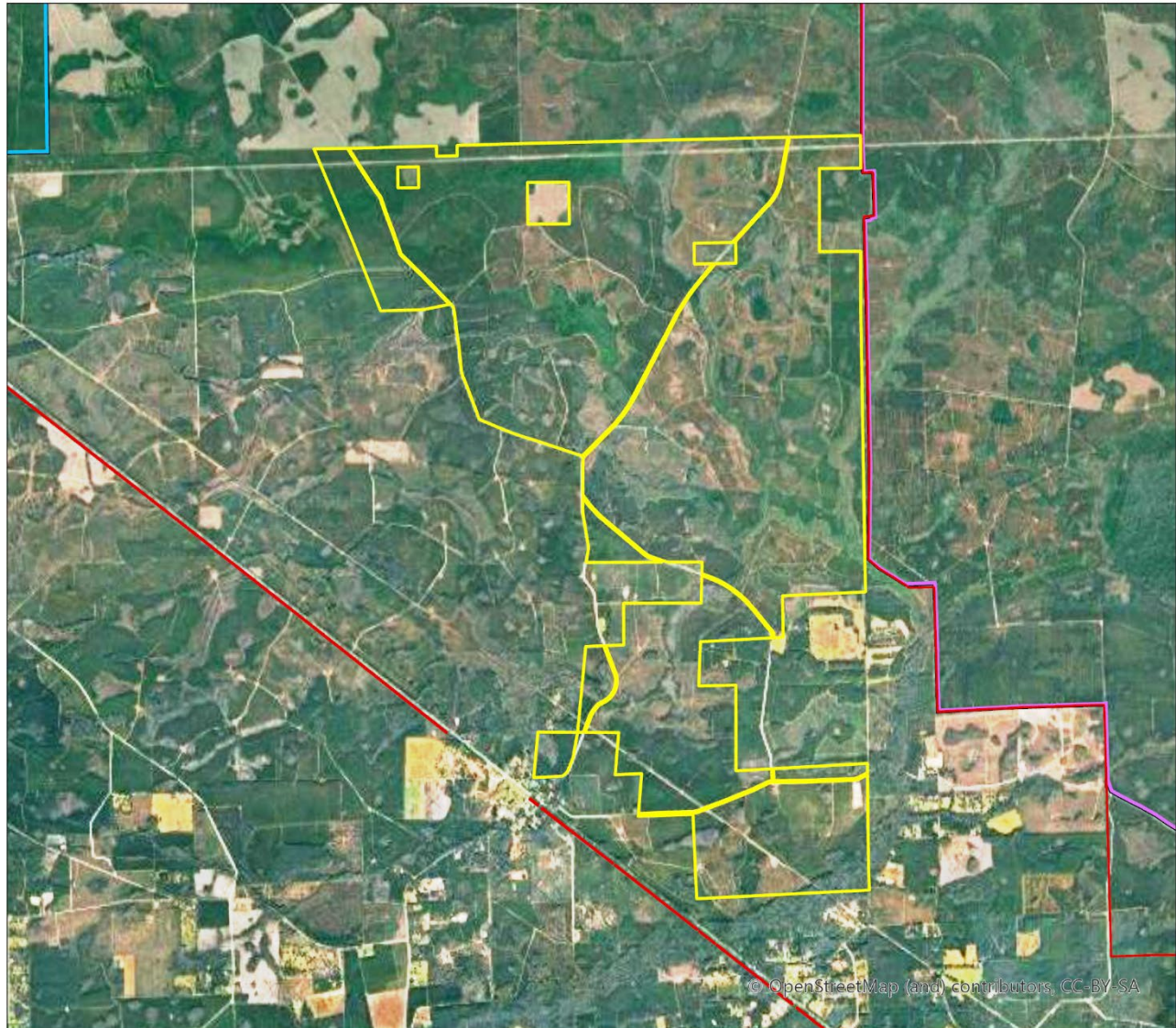
Final FF proposal boundary maps: Report requirement 259.105 (15)k, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

B1: Florida Forever map

B2: Aerial map

RAIFORD TO OSCEOLA GREENWAY EXTENSION FLORIDA FOREVER PROPOSAL

FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSAL BOUNDARY AS OF JULY 2026

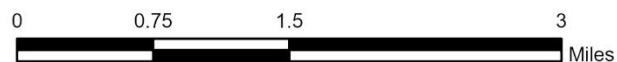


Map Produced by: FL Natural Areas Inventory, N. Pasco, July 2026

Background: Google Satellite Imagery 2023



- Florida Forever Proposal Boundary
- Florida Forever BOT Projects
- Existing Water Management District Conservation Lands
- Existing Private Conservation Lands



Appendix C:**PROPERTY ID #'S FOR FINAL RECOMMENDED BOUNDARY**

County	Parcel ID	Owner	Acres	Just (Market) Value	Parcel Designation
Columbia	094S1810355001	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	61.58	\$153,950	Essential
Columbia	104S1810358000	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	607.77	\$1,512,050	Essential
Columbia	114S1810360000	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	20.00	\$70,000	Essential
Columbia	114S1810360001	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	597.65	\$1,435,000	Essential
Columbia	124S1810363000	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	571.55	\$1,350,000	Essential
Columbia	134S1810364000	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	628.77	\$1,592,500	Essential
Columbia	144S1810365000	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	598.85	\$1,520,525	Essential
Columbia	154S1810366001	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	180.17	\$450,375	Essential
Columbia	234S1810397001	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	221.92	\$554,725	Essential
Columbia	234S1810397003	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	71.80	\$179,500	Essential
Columbia	244S1810402000	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	515.30	\$1,395,000	Essential
Columbia	254S1810406000	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	237.57	\$600,000	Essential
Columbia	264S1810407000 (Partial)	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	389.29	\$1,012,532	Essential
Columbia	264S1810412000	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	9.12	\$41,985	Essential
Columbia	364S1810559000	Rayonier Forest Resources LP	339.66	\$800,000	Essential
		TOTAL	5,051	\$12,668,142	

Appendix D:

Management Prospectus for the Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension, a fee simple proposal.

Florida Forest ServiceProposed Manager

The approximately 5,051-acre Raiford to Osceola Greenway Extension will be managed by the FFS as part of John M. Bethea State Forest upon state acquisition and amended into lease #4358. FFS may assign one Forest Area Supervisor, two Senior Forest Rangers, one Forester, and seven Forest Rangers to manage the tract.

Purpose and Scope

Under FFS management, sustainable forestland management will conserve and restore natural Florida ecosystems on the property and provide additional recreation opportunities to the public. FFS management of this tract will enhance the Olustee Creek watershed that connects Ocean Pond and the Santa Fe River System. The purpose of state acquisition is to connect public lands to existing Florida Forever projects to the east, Raiford Wildlife Management Area to the south, and Osceola National Forest to the northwest.

Qualifications for State Designation

The acquisition of this land aligns with the FFS's mission and strategic goals. A vital part of the mission is to "manage the forest resources through a stewardship ethic to assure they are available for future generations." FFS's strategic goals are to promote sound forest management practices to maintain the integrity of the environment and provide for future natural resource needs, and to manage public lands for their unique character while providing multiple benefits to the public.

This acquisition will expand public access and recreation, support ecosystem restoration, and enable multiple-use and silvicultural management activities in line with Best Management Practices to protect water quality and wildlife habitat. Additional benefits include increased acreage for recreational opportunities, such as camping, hiking, hunting, horseback riding, and photography, as well as hosting FFS-administered Operation Outdoor Freedom events.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

Many of the wetlands on the tract have been ecologically degraded by silvicultural activities. All timber stands are currently planted on bedded rows, which have altered the terrain. The poorly drained soils create wetter site conditions, which will be assessed on a site-by-site basis and potentially necessitate similar alterations to facilitate future timber establishment.

Management Implementation, Public Access, Site Security, and Protection of Infrastructure

Management strategies will center on the multiple-use concept, as defined in sections 589.04(3) and 253.034(2)(a) F.S. Implementation of this concept will utilize and conserve state forest resources in a harmonious and coordinated combination that will best serve the people of the State of Florida, and that is consistent with the purpose for which the forest was acquired. Multiple-use management for the tract will be accomplished through the following strategies:

- Practice sustainable forest management for the efficient generation of revenue and in support of state forest management objectives;
- Provide for resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities for multiple interests;

- Restore and manage healthy forests and native ecosystems ensuring the long-term viability of populations and species listed as endangered, threatened, or rare, and other components of biological diversity including game and nongame wildlife and plants;
- Protect known archaeological, historical, cultural, and paleontological resources;
- Restore, maintain, and protect hydrological functions related to water resources and the health of associated wetland and aquatic communities.

Revenue-generating Potential

This property has the means to provide revenue. Possible revenue sources may include but not be limited to:

- Recreational user fees
- Leases
- Timber sales
- Non-timber forest products

Other potential revenue-generating opportunities will be evaluated as appropriate.

Potential Multiple-Use Activities

The acquisition of the subject property will allow FFS to enhance multiple-use activities on the state forest, as required by Florida Statutes (253.034 – State-owned Land; Uses and 589.011 – Use of State Forest Lands). State acquisition and FFS management will promote harmonious, coordinated management of timber, conservation of fish and wildlife, forage, habitat, and water resources, protection of cultural and other biological resources, and recreational activities, all to best serve the citizens of the State of Florida.

Recreational use will be evaluated to provide the greatest public benefits while supporting the best conservation of the land, water, and resources. Recreational activities may include, but are not limited to, multiple-use trails, hiking, wildlife viewing, primitive camping, group camping, and Operation Outdoor Freedom events.

Timber resources will be managed to promote and improve forest health, including prescribed fire, invasive species treatment, and timber thinning and plantings, as appropriate.

Cooperators in Management Activities

Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Suwannee River Water Management District

Advisory Role
Advisory Role
Advisory Role

Management Costs and Sources of Revenue

Source	Startup	Recurring
	Land Acquisition Trust Fund	Land Acquisition Trust Fund
Salary (#FTE)	1 (park ranger)	1 (park ranger)
OPS (#OPS)	1 (park ranger/invasives)	1 (park ranger/invasives)
Resource Management	\$50,000	\$25,000
Capital Improvements	\$250,000	\$20,000

Visitor Services/Recreation	\$5,000	\$10,000
Support	\$100,000 (trucks, trailer, UTV)	\$15,000
Administration	Office, pole barn, shop, fence	
TOTAL		

Appendix E:

Imperiled Species FNAI Ranking Definitions

FNAI GLOBAL ELEMENT RANK

G1 = Critically imperiled globally because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.

G2 = Imperiled globally because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.

G3 = Either very rare and local throughout its range (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.

G4 = Apparently secure globally (may be rare in parts of range).

G5 = Demonstrably secure globally.

GH = Of historical occurrence throughout its range, may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).

GX = Believed to be extinct throughout range.

GXC = Extirpated from the wild but still known from captivity or cultivation.

G#? = Tentative rank (e.g., G2?).

G#G# = Range of rank; insufficient data to assign specific global rank (e.g., G2G3).

G#T# = Rank of a taxonomic subgroup such as a subspecies or variety; the G portion of the rank refers to the entire species and the T portion refers to the specific subgroup; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G3T1).

G#Q = Rank of questionable species - ranked as species but questionable whether it is species or subspecies; numbers have same definition as above (e.g., G2Q).

G#T#Q = Same as above, but validity as subspecies or variety is questioned.

GU = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned (e.g., GUT2).

GNA = Ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).

GNR = Element not yet ranked (temporary).

GNRTNR = Neither the element nor the taxonomic subgroup has yet been ranked.

FNAI STATE ELEMENT RANK

S1 = Critically imperiled in Florida because of extreme rarity (5 or fewer occurrences or less than 1000 individuals) or because of extreme vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.

S2 = Imperiled in Florida because of rarity (6 to 20 occurrences or less than 3000 individuals) or because of vulnerability to extinction due to some natural or man-made factor.

S3 = Either very rare and local in Florida (21-100 occurrences or less than 10,000 individuals) or found locally in a restricted range or vulnerable to extinction from other factors.

S4 = Apparently secure in Florida (may be rare in parts of range).

S5 = Demonstrably secure in Florida.

SH = Of historical occurrence in Florida, possibly extirpated, but may be rediscovered (e.g., ivory-billed woodpecker).

SX = Believed to be extirpated throughout Florida.

SU = Unrankable; due to a lack of information no rank or range can be assigned.

SNA = State ranking is not applicable because the element is not a suitable target for conservation (e.g. a hybrid species).

SNR = Element not yet ranked (temporary).

Appendix F:
Site Visit Photos



Planted pine



Ecotone between planted pine and floodplain forest



Floodplain forest



Cypress swamp



Floodplain forest



Floodplain forest