

ITEM 13:

Consider a Division of State Lands staff recommendation to remove the Bar-B Ranch, Larkin Ranch, and Lettuce Creek Cattle Company projects from the 2027 Florida Forever Priority List.

LOCATION:

Highlands, Martin, and Pasco counties

DIVISION OF STATE LANDS STAFF REMARKS:

Pursuant to section 259.032(6), Florida Statutes (F.S.), which states that “when at least 90 percent of the acreage of a project has been purchased for conservation and recreation purposes, the project may be removed from the list and the remaining acreage may continue to be purchased,” Division of State Lands staff has identified three projects that should be considered for removal from the Florida Forever priority list. Removing this project from the priority list does not prevent Florida Forever funds from being used to purchase the remaining property within this project pursuant to section 259.032(6), F.S. Furthermore, Rule 18-24.002(2)(b), Public Purposes and Categories of Projects Qualifying for Funding, provides that acres within projects that are no longer on the priority list still qualify for funding.

Bar-B Ranch

The Bar-B Ranch Florida Forever project, located in Martin County, contained 1,910 acres and was added to the priority list in 2022. In 2026, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) acquired an approximately 1,668-acre conservation easement from Bar-B Ranch Inc. Under stewardship of the landowner, this working cattle ranch protects the hydrologic connection between the St. Johns River and Everglades watersheds, benefiting the water quality of the St. Lucie River Estuary, Indian River Lagoon, Lake Okeechobee, and the Everglades. This project is now 87% complete. Division of State Lands staff recommend removing this project from the priority list as the goal of this project has been accomplished.

Larkin Ranch

The Larkin Ranch Florida Forever project, located in Pasco County, contained 1,075 acres and was added to the priority list in 2024. In 2026, DEP acquired an approximately 1,029-acre conservation easement from the landowner to protect habitat for imperiled species, including gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) and southeastern American kestrel (*Falco sparverius paulus*), as well as to protect groundwater recharge areas. This project is now 96% complete. Division staff recommend removing this project from the priority list as the goal of this project has been accomplished.

Lettuce Creek Cattle Company

The Lettuce Creek Cattle Company Florida Forever project, located in Highlands County, contained 377 acres and was added to the priority list in 2024. In 2026, DEP acquired an approximately 377-acre conservation easement from the landowner to provide a buffer from development and protect habitat for species of conservation concern including gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*), southern fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger niger*), and American kestrel (*Falco sparverius paulus*). This project is now 100% complete. Division staff recommend removing this project from the priority list as the goal of this project has been accomplished.

DIVISION OF STATE LANDS STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommend the removal of the Larkin Ranch and Lettuce Creek Cattle Company projects from the priority list because they are at least 90% complete.

Staff recommend the removal of the Bar-B Ranch project from the priority list as it is considered complete and the goal of this project has been accomplished.

ACQUISITION AND RESTORATION COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION:

Project	Watts	DHR	FFS	Griner	DEP	FWC	Palmer	Peppers	Gamblin	Selected
Bar-B Ranch: Remove from Priority List										
Larkin Ranch: Remove from Priority List										
Lettuce Creek Cattle Company: Remove from Priority List										