

Devil's Garden

Collier and Hendry Counties

Critical Natural Lands

Purpose for State Acquisition

Acquiring this project will contribute to Florida Forever goals of increasing protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels and filling a gap in the corridor for a large landscape for the federally endangered Florida panther. Numerous records of panther use of the property as well as numerous other rare and threatened plants and animals have been noted.

It will also increase the forestland available for sustainable management of natural resources. The project borders the Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest on the west and Dinner Island to the south. This project may also help complete the Florida National Scenic Trail, a statewide non-motorized trail that crosses a number of Florida Forever project sites. The trail is a congressionally designated national scenic trail.

Manager

The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is the recommended lead manager for most of the area (approximately 71,608 acres). Florida Forest Service/FFS will manage the two westernmost parcels (approximately 10,900 acres) adjoining the Okaloacoochee State Forest.

General Description

The Devil's Garden proposal includes 82,995 acres (per digitized boundaries) in Hendry and Collier counties.

The proposal has a single owner and includes four parcels. The major parcel (71,608 acres) adjoins the eastern boundary of Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest and encompasses an area, roughly 18 miles long (east-west) and six miles wide (north-south); an additional parcel (6,445 acres) is adjacent to the northeastern boundary of the State Forest and Okaloacoochee Slough Wildlife Management Area, and lies across Keri Road from the northwest corner of the major parcel. Two smaller parcels (T-shaped parcel: 3,328 acres and 1,127 acres) abut the southwestern boundary of the State Forest.

Devil's Garden is a huge tract of ranch land that has been heavily impacted by cattle ranching activities (conversion to pasture) and to a lesser extent by agriculture. Non-forested wetlands, including basin/depression marsh, swale, and wet prairie make up the dominant natural communities still present on the property. Mesic/wet flatwoods have been, to a large extent, cleared and converted to pasturelands. Prairie hammocks were scattered throughout the property and formed irregularly shaped forests, usually with basin/depression wetlands. In a helicopter survey, a few small (<15 acres) patches of dome swamp fringing swale systems could be seen in the southwestern T-shaped parcel. Both southern parcels have few remaining upland natural communities except for narrow fringes adjacent to wetlands; some hammock remains in the southwest corner of the T-shaped parcel.

Public Use

The property can accommodate resource-based recreation, including camping, picnicking, hiking,

Devil's Garden FNAI Elements	
Florida Panther	G5T1/S1
Florida Black Bear	G5T2/S2
Gopher Tortoise	G3/S3
Eastern Indigo Snake	G3/S3
Swallow-tailed Kite	G5/S2
Wood Stork	G4/S2
Crested Caracara	G5/S2
Little Blue Heron	G5/S4
White Ibis	G5/S4
9 rare species are associated with the project	

Placed on List	2002
Project Area (GIS Acres)	82,995
Acres Acquired (GIS)	11,656
at a Cost of	\$0
Acres Remaining (GIS)	71,339
with Estimated (Tax Assessed) Value of	\$9,483,649

natural resource appreciation (nature study), wildlife observation, bicycling, horseback riding and environmental education. Depending on management emphasis, the land could provide significant hunting opportunities. Careful planning would need to be done to coordinate hunting and wildlife observation. Because the project is so large, it may be possible to set areas aside where wildlife observation can be emphasized and encouraged.

Acquisition Planning

On December 5, 2002, the Acquisition & Restoration Council (ARC) added the Devil's Garden project to Group A of the Florida Forever 2003 Priority List. This fee-simple project, sponsored by the Nature Conservancy (TNC) and FFS, consisted of approximately 82,508 acres with a single owner, Alico Inc., and a 2001 taxable value of \$9,483,649. On December 14, 2007 ARC voted to move Devil's Garden to Group B of the 2008 Florida Forever Priority List.

On December 9, 2011 Devil's Garden was classified as a Critical Natural Lands project.

Coordination

TNC is the intermediary and is working to find a purchaser for the eastern portion of the tract (farm land).

Management Policy Statement

The primary goals of management for the Devil's Garden project are to increase protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels; protect, restore, and maintain the quality and natural functions of land, water, and wetland systems of the state; increase natural resource-based public recreational and educational opportunities including but not limited to wildlife viewing, hunting, hiking and camping; and increase the amount of forestland available for sustainable management of natural resources.

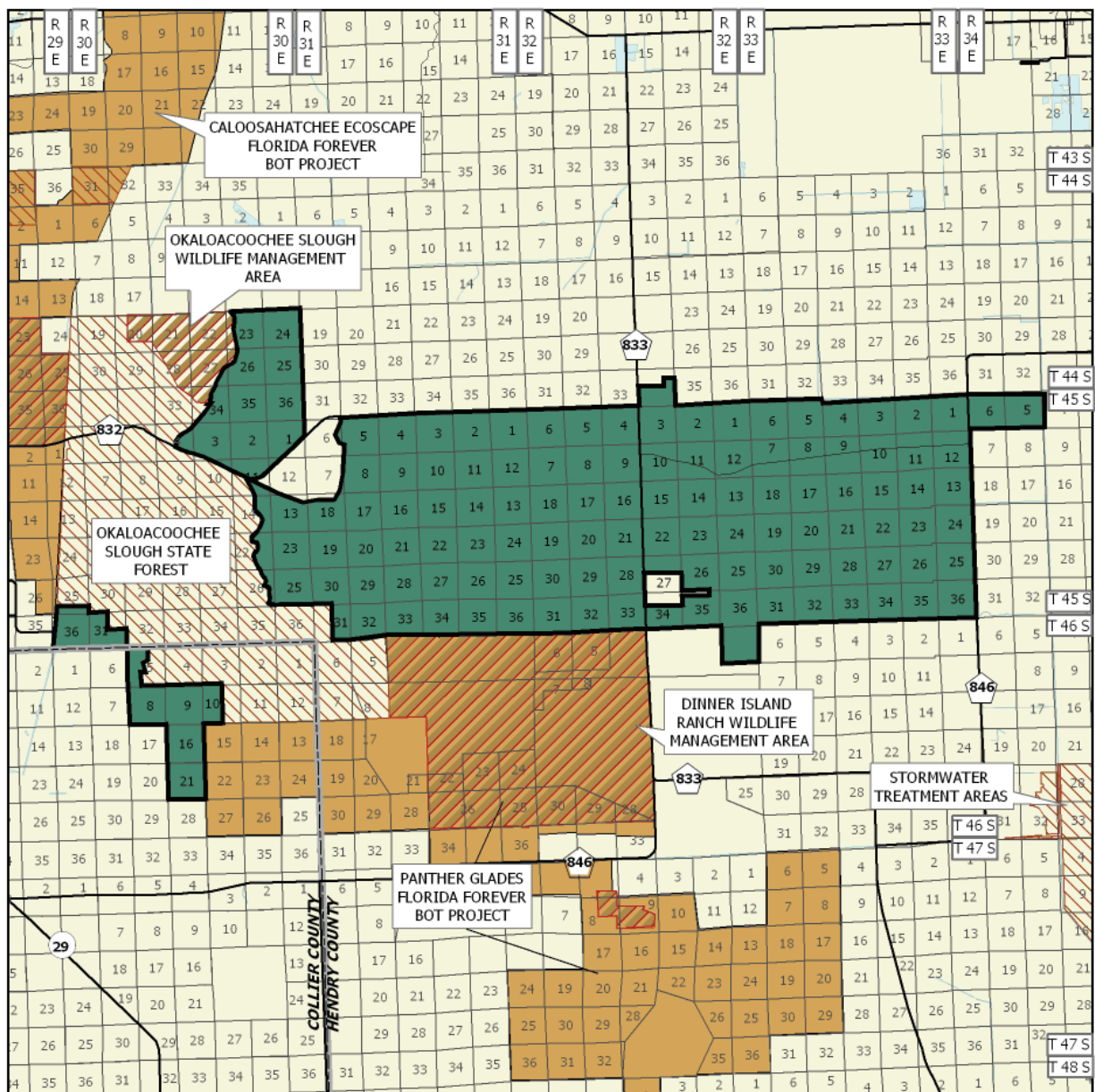
Management Prospectus

Qualifications for state designation Due to the diversity, and connectivity to the Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest, the two western most parcels (approximately 10,900 acres) qualify as State Forests. The high wildlife resource values and the designation of primary or secondary panther habitat zones on the project qualify the eastern parcel (approximately 71,608 acres) as a wildlife management area.

Manager FFS will manage the two western most parcels as part of the Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest. FWC will manage the eastern parcel.

Conditions affecting intensity of management Much of the project's drier natural community types have been disturbed; many converted to some improved form of agriculture. This conversion usually meant some type of hydrologic alteration for water management. This property contains vast areas of wetlands with sensitive natural resources. Land management and public use will specifically be structured to improve and protect these areas. Surrounding land uses are not expected to affect prescribed burning on this parcel. The level of management intensity and related management costs is expected to be initially high to obtain the necessary information and resources to restore and manage the system. Given the importance of this property to panther recovery, this link between habitat management and panther use will be critical to insuring the property is managed consistent with the primary purposes for acquisition.

Timetable for implementing management and provisions for security and protection of infrastructure During the first year after acquisition, emphasis will be placed on site security, posting boundaries, public access, fire management, resource inventory, exotic species control and removal of refuse. Conceptual management plans will be developed describing the management goals and specific objectives necessary to implement future resource management. Once the area is acquired, steps will be taken to ensure that the public is provided appropriate access while simultaneously affording protection of sensitive resources. Public use will be limited to activities that will have little or no impact to these areas. Vehicular use by the public will be confined to designated roads. Unnecessary access points will be closed. Both agencies will cooperate with and seek the assistance of other state agencies, local government entities and interested parties as appropriate. Long-range plans for this property will generally be directed toward the restoration of disturbed areas and maintenance of natural communities. To the greatest extent practical, disturbed sites will be restored to conditions that would be expected to occur in naturally functioning ecosystems. Management activities will also stress enhancing abundance and spatial distribution of threatened and endangered species. Multiple use principles will be practiced where compatible with resource management goals and acquisition purposes. An all-season prescribed burning management plan will be developed and implemented to improve the habitat quality of native fire-dependent plant communities and wildlife habitats.



DEVIL'S GARDEN

HENDRY AND COLLIER COUNTIES

-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Essential Parcel(s) Remaining
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects
-  State Owned Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands



MARCH 2006

Revenue generating potential Management will seek to improve revenue-generating potential by improving wildlife diversity and resource-based recreation. Anticipated revenues from wildlife conservation will come from sales of hunting licenses, wildlife management area permits and other special hunting permits. Additional revenues might be generated from ecotourism and wildlife viewing activities. Timber sales will be conducted as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions. These sales will primarily take place in pine stands and will provide a variable source of revenue dependent upon a variety of factors. Due to the existing condition of the timber resource on the property, revenue generating potential of this project is expected to be low. Some revenues might be generated from agricultural farming contracts in areas currently being farmed as row crops until such areas can be restored in the interest of wildlife conservation.

Cooperators in Management Activities The FWC and FFS will cooperate with other federal, state and local

government agencies, including the South Florida Water Management District, in managing the area. **Management Costs and Sources of Revenue** The Devil's Garden proposal, when acquired by the state, will require 14 FTE positions to manage the project area. Certain activities may be privatized, which would reduce the number of FTEs required. Funding for natural-resource management and public use administration would come from the CARL (Conservation and Recreation Lands) Trust Fund (as of 2015 the LATF). It is anticipated that revenue sources would include public use fees and timber harvests.

Management Costs (for interim management)

Salary (6 FTE)	\$216,639
Expense	\$725,000
Operating Capital Outlay	\$418,200
Total	\$1,354,839

Updated February 4, 2016



A US Fish and Wildlife camera catches a Florida panther sharpening claws near Naples.