

ITEM 7: Consider Project Evaluation Reports for the Red Hills Conservation and BR Ranch 2019 Cycle 1 Florida Forever Project Proposals.

STAFF REMARKS: On December 14, 2018, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) voted to move the Gem Land, BR Ranch and Telogia Creek 2019 Cycle 1 Florida Forever proposals on for more detailed review. To reflect the resource characteristics, The GEM Land proposal has been revised to be named Red Hills Conservation. The Telogia Creek landowner subsequently requested that project be deferred.

As a result of that review process, the Division of State Lands (DSL) has prepared project evaluation reports for both proposals for the Red Hills Conservation and BR Ranch proposals for ARC review. Both projects are proposed as less-than-fee acquisitions.

DSL STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Approve evaluation reports.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

☐ **APPROVE**

☐ **APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS:** _____

☐ **DEFER**

☐ **WITHDRAW**

☐ **NOT APPROVED**

☐ **OTHER:** _____

B R RANCH
Less Than Fee
Florida Forever Project Evaluation Report

DeSoto County

prepared by
Division of State Lands Staff
Acquisition and Restoration Council Liaison Staff
and
Florida Natural Areas Inventory

DRAFT for April 19, 2019 ARC meeting

APPROVED on

Proposed Land Manager	Landowner, Mike Boran
Acres	4,041
Just Value	\$11.7 million
Application Date	October 31, 2019
Sponsor	Julie Morris
Recommended Final Acres	4,041
Final Just Value	\$11.7 million

Please note: The proposal size (acres) used in this evaluation was calculated by Florida Natural Areas Inventory using ArcGIS. This value may differ from that reported by the applicant or agency members of the evaluation team.

***B R Ranch
Florida Forever Project Evaluation Report
DeSoto County***

Executive Summary

The BR Ranch (BR) proposal is in DeSoto County. It is 4,041 acres and has a just value of \$11.7 million. The total acres as shown on the property cards is 3,888. This is a less than fee proposal sponsored by the National Wildlife Refuge Association and the Florida Conservation group. Located roughly midway between Arcadia to the northeast and Port Charlotte to the southwest, the property is accessed by a series of dirt roads from County Road 761. State Road 72 is about 2 miles north of the northernmost boundary of the proposal, and the Sarasota County line is about 1 mile west.

The BR is bordered to the southeast by RV Griffin Preserve. The west and northwest boundaries border the Boran Ranch Mitigation Bank and the Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever (FF) project. Most of the north and east side of the BR is privately owned pasturelands, with agriculture, and native habitat interspersed. The Peace River Refuge FF project is also within 5 miles of the BR.

The BR is proposed for acquisition to preserve the property's natural and hydrological resources and increase connectivity with existing conservation lands. It would contribute to a large landscape of conservation lands that includes Myakka River State Park, Lewis Longino Preserve and T. Mabry Carlton, Jr. Memorial Reserve. It meets the FF requirements of enhancing coordination and completion of land acquisition projects, increasing the protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels; protecting, restoring and maintaining the quality and natural functions of land, water, and wetland systems of the state (aquifer recharge, surface water protection, natural floodplain function, and wetlands) and, ensuring that sufficient quantities of water are available to meet the current and future needs of natural systems and the citizens of the state.

Half of the proposal is improved pasture (sod farm and 400 head of cattle in a cow-calf operation). The balance is more natural, consisting of a wetland mosaic of marshes, cypress swamps, and hammocks that form the headwaters of two creek systems that are tributary to Horse Creek, a major tributary of the Peace River. This wetland mosaic has been partially channelized by ditches. Approximately 622 acres of mesic/wet flatwoods (under-represented natural community) can be found on the site. The entire proposal provides for surface water protection and aquifer recharge, at a variety of priority levels. Almost half the property is a Priority 1 for surface water protection.

The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory shows that the proposal meets Florida Forever Measures A (A1, A2), B (B1, B2,B3, B4, B6), C (C1, C4, C5, C8), D (D3), E (E2), and G (G1,G3) to some degree. The BR lies within a landscape that is under increasing pressure from urban expansion and development, and phosphate mining.

This proposal would be an appropriate addition to Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever project boundary, if ARC chose to do so by motion, after approval by a roll call vote.

If acquired, this site would be managed by the landowner, and periodically monitored by DSL for compliance with the BOT-approved perpetual conservation easement terms. The Board of Trustees would hold the easement. Anytime the land would transfer to another ownership, the perpetual easement and its conditions run with the title. The Board of Trustees is granted the opportunity to exercise its right of first refusal (to acquire the land in fee simple) any time that land under an acquired perpetual conservation easement is transferred from one landowner to another.

The ARC liaison staff, a SWFWMD representative, and FNAI staff conducted a site assessment of the proposal site on February 19, 2019.

PURPOSE FOR ACQUISITION

The BR Ranch (BR) is proposed as a conservation easement for the following public purposes: (a) Enhance the coordination and completion of land acquisition projects; (b) Increase the protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels; (c) Protect, restore, and maintain the quality and natural functions of land, water, and wetland systems of the state (natural floodplain and wetlands function); and, (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 (through aquifer recharge and surface water protection.

LOCATION AND PROXIMITY TO OTHER MANAGED AREAS

The BR Florida Forever proposal is 4,041 contiguous acres (3,888 acres by county property cards), in southwestern DeSoto County, and is offered for less-than-fee acquisition. Located roughly midway between Arcadia to the northeast and Port Charlotte to the southwest, the property is accessed by a series of dirt roads from County Road 761. State Road 72 is about 2 miles north of the northernmost boundary of the proposal, and the Sarasota County line is about 1 mile west.

The site is immediately east of the Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever BOT project, immediately north of the RV Griffin Reserve (Southwest Florida Water Management District), and less than 1 mile west of Peace River State Forest. Boran Ranch Mitigation Bank is adjacent on the western boundary of the proposal. The application describes it as one of the last large, intact private ranch ownerships in the region. Acquisition of the proposal would contribute to a large landscape of conservation lands that includes Myakka River State Park (Florida Department of Environmental Protection), Lewis Longino Preserve (Southwest Florida Water Management District), and T. Mabry Carlton, Jr. Memorial Reserve (Sarasota County) in addition to those mentioned above.

RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

FNAI has provided the following resource description:

This evaluation is based on information gathered from the proposal, 1943, 1999, 2004, and 2014 aerial photography, US Geologic Survey (USGS) 7.5' topographic maps, Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) Cooperative Land Cover data (FNAI, Florida Cooperative Land Cover Map, version 3.2), and information in the FNAI database. A field survey was conducted on February 19, 2019, by FNAI biologist Kim Gullede, along with the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) liaison staff. The proposal property is situated on the DeSoto Slope Province of the Southwestern Flatwoods District (Brooks 1981),

a large broad, sandy plain characterized by mostly poorly-drained medium fine sand and silt, primarily of the Smyrna, Immokalee, and Myakka soil series.

The proposal is within the Peace River watershed, which drains to the Charlotte Harbor estuary. The property contains a mosaic of marshes, cypress swamps, and hammocks that form the headwaters of two creek systems that are tributary to Horse Creek, a major tributary of the Peace River. This wetland mosaic has been partially channelized by ditches. There is little topographic relief across the proposal property, ranging from approximately 30 to 40 feet above mean sea level.

Approximately half of BR Ranch is in varying degrees of natural condition. Mesic flatwoods and depression marshes each occupy about 15% of the acreage, with a complex of hammocks, cypress swamps, and basin marshes making up the remainder of the natural acreage. The largest blocks of mesic flatwoods occur in the northern and far southern portions of the site. Several of these are in good condition with a very open, mature canopy of South Florida slash pine (*Pinus elliottii* var. *densa*). Few old growth trees are present, and only a single longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) was observed during the site visit, although remnant trees may be scattered throughout the property. Pines are almost absent in some areas which may have historically been similar to dry prairie in structure.

In the highest quality flatwoods, the shrub and groundcover strata are kept in good condition with frequent prescribed fire (every three years). Roller chopping has also been used to help reduce the saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) cover and height. According to the owner, the property was not burned frequently under prior ownership, and the flatwoods are still in a state of recovery. The more open, fire-maintained blocks have a diverse groundcover dominated by a mix of short shrubs less than one meter in height and a mix of grasses and herbs characteristic of natural flatwoods. The shrub layer is dominated by saw palmetto and dwarf live oak (*Quercus minima*), with netted pawpaw (*Asimina reticulata*), Atlantic St. John's wort (*Hypericum tenuifolium*), gallberry (*Ilex glabra*), and shiny blueberry (*Vaccinium myrsinites*) frequent. Most of the better flatwoods on the property have a good cover of wiregrass (*Aristida stricta*). The best quality areas have a diverse herb layer that includes dwarf sundew (*Drosera brevifolia*), tall elephantsfoot (*Elephantopus elatus*), rose rush (*Lygodesmia aphylla*), yellow flowered butterwort (*Pinguicula lutea*), narrowleaf silkgrass (*Pityopsis graminifolia*), orange milkwort (*Polygala lutea*), blackroot (*Pterocaulon pycnostachyum*), lopsided indiagrass (*Sorghastrum secundum*), yellow hatpins (*Syngonanthus flavidulus*), and Carolina yellow-eyed grass (*Xyris caroliniana*).

Closer to hammocks and in areas surrounded by wetlands, the mesic flatwoods are in fair to poor condition, with tall, often dense shrubs and a weedier understory often densely invaded by the exotic cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*; FLEPPC I). The groundcover is often dominated by bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*) and disturbed by cattle grazing. These areas also had signs of prescribed burning, but without exotics treatment and further management will likely remain in poor condition. Most areas of flatwoods on the property are bisected by wide, grassy, pasture lanes that provide grazing for cattle and vehicle access.

Depression marshes make up approximately 14% of the proposal and are scattered all over the ranch. Those located in relatively natural surroundings, i.e. surrounded by mesic flatwoods, are in good condition and retain typical marsh vegetation, although all are disturbed by cattle. Hog damage is occasional. These marshes have zones of vegetation ranging from sawgrass (*Cladium jamaicense*) and pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*) in the deeper central portions, sometimes with stands of coastalplain willow (*Salix caroliniana*), to shallower edges dominated by peelbark St. John's wort (*Hypericum fasciculatum*), myrtleleaf St. John's wort (*Hypericum myrtifolium*), clustered bushmint (*Hyptis alata*), primrosewillow (*Ludwigia* sp.), climbing hempvine (*Mikania scandens*), combleaf mermaidweed (*Proserpinaca pectinata*), grassy arrowhead (*Sagittaria graminea*), or sand cordgrass (*Spartina bakeri*). Marshes located in pastures or otherwise disturbed by cattle or vehicles are typically dominated by species such as soft rush (*Juncus effusus* ssp. *solutus*) and broadleaf cattail (*Typha latifolia*), often with weedy species such as big carpetgrass (*Axonopus furcatus*) mixed with bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*) around the perimeter. At least ten marshes have been partly or completely excavated and converted to cattle ponds, and more have been artificially drained by ditching. The invasive exotic water lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*; FLEPPC I) and West Indian marsh grass (*Hymenachne amplexicaulis*; FLEPPC I) were both observed growing in artificial ponds or the adjacent disturbed marsh.

Historically, the large complex of marshes and swamps in the northern portion of the property were fringed with hydric hammocks, a closed canopy forest of cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*), live oak (*Quercus virginiana*), and laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*). For the most part, these hammocks remain in good condition. Some of the hammocks on the property are almost exclusively comprised of a cabbage palm overstory with oaks being occasional. Citrus trees (*Citrus* sp.) are present in the subcanopy of many hammocks. In addition to the palm/oak dominants, sugarberry (*Celtis laevigata*) and red mulberry (*Morus rubra*) are also common in the canopy and subcanopy layers. The oaks and palms have an abundance of

epiphytes such as resurrection fern (*Pleopeltis michauxiana*), southern needleleaf (*Tillandsia setacea*), Spanish moss (*T. usneoides*), golden polypody (*Phlebodium aureum*), shoestring fern (*Vittaria lineata*), and Florida butterfly orchid (*Encyclia tampensis*). Tall and short shrubs include cabbage palm, wild lime (*Zanthoxylum fagara*), wild coffee (*Psychotria nervosa*), and shortleaf wild coffee (*P. sulzneri*). Herbs include Carolina ponysfoot (*Dichondra carolinensis*), fireweed (*Erechtites hieraciifolius*), Florida Keys hempvine (*Mikania cordifolia*), and maiden fern (*Thelypteris* sp.). Throughout many of the hammocks and swamps on the property, wetland nightshade (*Solanum tampicense*; FLEPPC I) is a common invader, often becoming dominant in the understory. Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolia*; FLEPPC I) is frequent, and both Caesar's weed (*Urena lobata*; FLEPPC I) and rosary pea (*Abrus precatorius*; FLEPPC I) occur occasionally throughout the hammocks. Cattle and hogs are a continuing source of soil disturbance.

Past fire exclusion in areas of former mesic flatwoods adjacent to hammocks has contributed to the expansion of hardwoods into habitats originally dominated by pines. These successional forests contain remnant slash pines, but are dominated by a mix of swamp laurel oak, cabbage palm, and live oak. The understory is more depauperate than a natural hammock, often dominated by saw palmetto.

A complex of deep basin wetlands in the northern portion of the property are a mosaic of marshes and swamps that form the headwaters of a creek draining to Horse Creek. The open marshes are mainly vegetated with sawgrass (*Cladium jamaicense*) or large stands of coastalplain willow (*Salix caroliniana*). The swamps have a canopy of small to medium pond cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*). Epiphytes are common in these trees and include Balbis' airplant (*Tillandsia balbisiana*), common wild-pine (*Tillandsia fasciculata*), southern needleleaf (*Tillandsia setacea*), and Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*). The understory is very open and marshy with a mix of herbs including spadeleaf (*Centella asiatica*), common dayflower (*Commelina diffusa* var. *diffusa*), marshpennywort (*Hydrocotyle* sp.), and iris (*Iris* sp.). Two FLEPPC Category I invasive exotics are common in these swamps – wetland nightshade (*Solanum tampicense*) and West Indian marsh grass (*Hymenachne amplexicaulis*).

The large wetland mosaic is impacted by several ditches, one of which was observed during the site visit occupied by an American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*). The channel also had a dense cover of the exotic water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*; FLEPPC I), cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*). Other shallow ditches are common along the road, often along elevated vehicle trails. These were often invaded with torpedo grass (*Panicum repens*) or West Indian marsh grass (*Hymenachne amplexicaulis*), both FLEPPC Category I invasive exotics.

Almost half of the BR Ranch proposal acreage is pasture, sod fields, or hay fields. The properties are working cow/calf cattle ranches. Some of the pasture land is wooded to some extent with live oak, cabbage palm, and/or slash pine, some saw palmetto, and a bahiagrass groundcover. Tropical soda apple (*Solanum viarum*; FLEPPC I) was only observed at a single location and doesn't appear to be a serious problem. However, cogon grass (FLEPPC I) was frequently seen invading around fence lines.

Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI)

Natural communities and landcover types within Florida Forever proposal

Community or Landcover	Acres	Percent of Proposal
Mesic flatwoods	622	15
Depression marsh	547	14
Hydric hammock	321	8
Basin marsh	268	7
Basin swamp	60	1
Dome swamp	6	<1
Pasture-improved	1660	41
Agriculture	256	6
Successional hydric shrubland/forest	85	2
Successional hardwood forest	73	2
Pasture semi-improved	46	1
Road	38	1
Developed	33	1
Abandoned pasture	13	<1
Artificial pond	12	<1
Ditch/canal	1	<1
Total	4041	100

This table lists, in approximate order of estimated areal extent, natural communities and other land cover types within the site's boundaries.

GOALS, MEASURES AND CRITERIA

The primary source for resource-related acreages is the Florida Forever Measures Evaluation (FFME) table prepared by FNAI. For additional relevant information, sources used will be specifically identified.

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.

This proposal would contribute to the state's effort to enhance essential natural resources, ecosystem services, and connect linkage corridors, including ecological greenways.

Measure A2:

The number of acres protected through the use of alternatives to fee simple acquisition. This application is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition.

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.

Florida Forever Measures Evaluation provided by FNAI reports this project will provide a total of 278 acres (7%) of Strategic Habitat Conservation Area (SHCA).

Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission provided the following additional comments:

Approximately 7% of BR lies within a designated FWC SHCA for species including the Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) and American swallow-tailed kite (*Elanoides forficatus*). Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas are areas within the State designated by FWC as ecologically significant and important for conservation of imperiled species and focal species habitat. They are composed of Grid data representing areas important to flora, fauna, and natural communities based on known occurrence information and recent land use/land cover maps. proposed lands for conservation management that are necessary to protect viable populations of 44 focal wildlife species and other analyzed elements of

biological diversity that include rare plants, rare biological communities, and wetlands important for wading birds. The FWC GIS Environmental Resources Analysis containing more detailed information concerning the FWC’s IWHRS analysis, focal species data, SHCA data, wildlife observation data, etc. was provided to the ARC members and staff electronically and under separate cover as an addendum to this assessment. The explanation of the FWC analysis can be found in the appendix of this report.

Measure B2:

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

An analysis of priority conservation areas based on Florida Forever Conservation Needs Assessment data may be found in the Florida Forever Measures table. Habitat conservation priorities for 281 of Florida’s rarest species were mapped and divided into six priority classes. The Florida Forever Measures table shows the acres for each priority class found on the BR Ranch proposal. Overall, the site contains approximately 2,355 acres (58% of site) of rare species habitat. The habitat is mostly Priority 5 (47% of site) with the remainder in Priority 4 (11%) and Priority 6 (< 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.

Rare species habitat based on FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities for 281 species with the greatest conservation need

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	Acres
<i>Drymarchon couperi</i>	Eastern Indigo Snake	G3	1,990
<i>Mycteria americana</i>	Wood Stork	G4	790

This table lists the

Measure B3:

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

According to the Office of Greenways and Trails, the BR Ranch is a Priority 3 ecological corridor within the Florida Ecological Greenways Network, an important connection between the Myakka and Peace Rivers, and other large conservation lands to the southeast, this includes Babcock Ranch in Charlotte

County. BR Ranch is a high priority for the Significant Surface Waters layer due to its significant protection of intact headwater creeks that are tributaries to Horse Creek and in turn the lower Peace River.

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.

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 BR Ranch proposal alone does not meet this measure, but its acquisition would contribute to a large, contiguous landscape-sized protection area of more than 119,000 acres, which includes Myakka River State Park, T. Mabry Carlton, Jr. Memorial Reserve, RV Griffin Reserve, Longino Ranch Conservation Easement, Walton Ranch, Pinelands Reserve, Myakka Creek Conservation Easement, and several other protected lands.

Measure B6:

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

The FFME noted only one G5-listed species occurrence on the proposal, and the site would not be publicly managed if acquired as a perpetual conservation easement.

However, the FNAI noted that, during the site visit, numerous wading birds and other birds of conservation concern were documented by FWC biologist Jennifer Myers. Nearby wetlands have been documented to support nesting by wading birds (snowy egret, tricolored heron, black-crowned night-heron, white ibis), and the abundant marshes and willow heads on the proposal provide an excellent resource for these species. Florida sandhill crane and American kestrel were also observed. A gopher tortoise burrow was seen during the site visit. Common wild-pine was seen growing on a pond cypress,

and is likely found throughout the hammocks on the site. The good quality groundcover of the southern block of mesic flatwoods was observed to harbor yellow butterworts.

Crested caracaras are reported by the applicant to use the proposal, which has suitable habitat for this species. Crested caracaras are increasingly threatened by residential development and land conversion to intensive agricultural use. Several other species reported from the property but not seen during the site assessment are listed in the table below. Additionally, Florida panthers (*Puma concolor coryi*, G5T1, S1, LE, FE) is reported by the applicant to have been seen on adjacent property. Roseate spoonbills (*Platalea ajaja*, G5, S2, N, ST) are reported by adjacent property owners to roost on those properties. (Rarity rankings listed above are in the following order: FNAI global (G, T) and state (S) ranks, federal status, state status.)

The Florida Forever Measures 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 lack sufficient data to justify addition to the FNAI database at this time. The table below contains species falling into any of these observational categories, as well as species gleaned from other sources (e.g., Florida Breeding Bird Atlas) with different degrees of locational precision.

The FFME 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 lack sufficient data to justify addition to the FNAI database at this time. The table below contains species falling into any of these observational categories, as well as species gleaned from other sources (e.g., Florida Breeding Bird Atlas) with different degrees of locational precision.

Rare plants and animals documented or reported to occur within the Florida Forever proposal conservation need

Scientific name	Common name	Global Rank	State Rank	Federal Status	State Status
Rare plants documented on site					
<i>Pinguicula lutea</i>	yellow butterwort	G4G5	S3	N	T
<i>Tillandsia fasciculata</i>	common wild-pine	G5	SNR	N	E
Additional rare plants reported on site by applicant					
none					
Rare animals documented on site					
<i>Alligator mississippiensis</i>	American alligator	G5	S4	SAT	FT(S/A)
<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>	gopher tortoise	G3	S3	C	ST
<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	little blue heron	G5	S4	N	ST
<i>Eudocimus albus</i>	white ibis	G5	S4	N	N
<i>Falco sparverius paulus</i>	Southeastern American Kestrel	G5T4	S3	N	ST
<i>Antigone canadensis pratensis</i>	Florida sandhill crane	G5T2	S2	N	ST
<i>Mycteria americana</i>	wood stork	G4	S2	LT	FT
<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	glossy ibis	G5	S3	N	N
Additional rare animals reported on site by applicant					
<i>Athene cunicularia floridana</i>	Florida burrowing owl	G4T3	S3	N	ST
<i>Drymarchon couperi</i>	eastern indigo snake	G3	S3	LT	FT
<i>Buteo brachyurus</i>	short-tailed hawk	G4G5	S1	N	N
<i>Caracara cheriway</i>	crested caracara	G5	S2	LT	FT
<i>Elanoides forficatus</i>	swallow-tailed kite	G5	S2	N	N
<i>Sciurus niger shermani</i>	Sherman's fox squirrel	G5T3	S3	N	SSC
<i>Ursus americanus floridanus</i>	Florida black bear	G5T4	S4	N	N

The FWC provided the following additional information:

The GIS analysis of the FWC Integrated Wildlife Habitat Ranking System (IWHRS) model indicates BR has a mean value of 3.9 out of a possible value of 10. The analysis also shows approximately 39% is habitat for a range of 1 to 3 focal species, 27% is habitat for a range of 4 to 6 focal species, 14% is habitat for 7 to 9 focal species, and 6% is habitat for a range of 10 to 12 focal species (imperiled or rare wildlife). All the project is identified as Priority 1 or 2 (of 5) for the Critical Lands and Waters Identification Project.

The Florida Natural Areas Inventory Element Occurrence database does not contain any records for rare wildlife or plant species on BR, which is reflective of the lack of field surveys on the area. During the field tour, listed wildlife species observed included Florida sandhill crane, gopher tortoise (burrows), and several species of wading birds. Adult sandhill cranes were observed during the tour and the landowner reported frequent sightings of adults with flightless young, indicating that nesting occurs on BR. The pastures on BR are suitable for foraging by cranes, and many of the freshwater marshes are suitable for nesting habitat. Gopher tortoise burrows were observed in the southern portion of the tract, on a slight elevation along a fence line. The land manager reported that burrows are also common in drier parts of the area. The frequent fire regime in native areas provides excellent gopher tortoise habitat, though the depth to water table likely limits their distribution to higher areas. Wading birds were primarily observed foraging in the wetlands on the area. The land manager has not observed any roosts or nesting colonies, but several of the larger wetlands contained willows and other woody species that could provide roosting or nesting habitat for wading birds.

Crested caracaras were not observed during the tour, but the land manager reported that crested caracaras are frequently observed on BR and that they have observed nesting in a pasture on the area. Caracaras are known to occur in the vicinity of BR and the condition of the pastures on BR are suitable for caracara use. The land manager also reported that Florida panthers (*Puma concolor coryi*) have been documented on neighboring properties via wildlife cameras. This area likely contributes to habitat connectivity that is necessary for panthers and other wide-ranging species, given its juxtaposition within a mosaic of conservation lands and private ranches.

Florida bonneted bats (*Eumops floridanus*) have not been documented on BR, but FWC researchers have documented that individual bats from nearby Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area fly to this

general area for foraging. BR contains suitable foraging and roosting habitat for Florida bonneted bats and is within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service draft consultation area for the species.

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. Approximately 487 acres of natural mesic flatwoods is in fair to good condition and maintained with regular use of fire, with only minor disturbances from cattle paths and grazing. Another 135 acres of poor quality mesic flatwoods would require more intensive efforts to restore a natural structure and more native species to the groundcover. The depression marshes and hammocks would benefit from reduced disturbance from hogs. Wooded rangeland (semi-improved pasture) would require considerable long-term commitment to restore to native species and is outside the scope of restoration commitment for a working cattle ranch.

Invasive exotic plant control needs of the property are considerable. Cogon grass is common on the property, as is Brazilian pepper. The marshes and ditches harbor stands of West Indian marsh grass and torpedo grass. A baseline assessment to determine the full extent of invasive plant species is warranted if acquisition of the easement occurs.

The FFS comments through their mission lens of silviculture and agriculture were as follows: Occurrences of tropical soda apple, Brazilian pepper, water hyacinth and cogongrass were observed during time of reconnaissance, as well as some evidence of feral hog activity throughout the property. The landowner may want to consider establishing an eradication plan for invasive flora species. Hogs, however, are reportedly a non-issue, as the managers have a feral hog control plan that is implemented periodically.

The FWC's comments through their mission lens of wildlife habitat were as follows: Exotic invasive plant species do not appear to be a major issue on BR with cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*) and tropical soda apple (*Solanum viarum* Dunal) reported by the land manager as the primary problems. During the field visit, a couple of large infestations of cogongrass an acre in size or less were observed, as were numerous Brazilian pepper trees (*Schinus terebinthifolia*). Overall, native communities on BR appear to be well-managed and support a variety of plant and wildlife species. Pastures on BR are relatively open, with adequate snags and trees to provide perching and roosting habitat for wildlife and inclusions of xeric habitat.

Measure C2:

The percentage of water segments that fully meet, partially meet, or do not meet their designated uses as reported in the Department of Environmental Protection's State Water Quality Assessment 305(b) report.

The DEP DEAR office noted that the property is slightly over 4,000 acres in western Desoto County near the Sarasota County boundary. It is in the Peace River watershed and would provide aquifer and development protection. The final DEAR score for the proposal is 3 (medium water quality protection benefits.)

Measure C4:

The number of acres acquired that protect natural floodplain functions.

Approximately 1,405 acres (35%) provides for the protection of natural floodplain functions, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI. (See appendix for more detail.)

Measure C5:

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

Approximately 4,013 acres (99%) provides for the protection of surface waters, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI. (See appendix for more detail.)

Measure C8:

The number of acres of functional wetland systems protected.

Approximately 1,513 acres (37%) provides for the protection of functional wetlands, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI. (see appendix for more detail.)

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 land protected by BR Ranch will contribute to the current and future water quality and quantity needs of the region. This includes protecting lower Horse Creek and the lower Peace River. The RV Griffin Reserve immediately adjacent south of BR Ranch and RV Griffin Reserve was acquired by SWFWMD and is managed by the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority for regional water supply., which means this property likely serves as an important buffer for protecting this significant public water supply.

Measure D3:

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

Approximately 4,044 acres (100%) provides for the protection of groundwater recharge areas, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI. (see appendix for more detail.)

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.

This is a less than fee proposal, so availability for public use is expected to be minimal. However, the Florida Forest Service noted in their assessment a periodic availability for Operation Outdoor Freedom if the proposal were acquired as a conservation easement.

DEP Division of Recreation and Parks provided the following information regarding need and potential for natural resource based recreation if some portion of the parcel were offered for fee simple acquisition in the future. First, they noted that the BR property appears ideal for numerous outdoor activities tracked

by SCORP, including wildlife viewing, nature study, and camping, as well as trail-related activities – hiking, biking, horseback riding.

SCORP breaks down Florida's 67 counties into 8 regions to assess recreation needs. As BR Ranch is in DeSoto County, this property falls within the Southwest SCORP region. DeSoto is one of 3 rural counties (Rural Areas of Opportunity) as defined by the Office of the Governor in SCORP's SW region (Glades and Hendry are the others). Other counties in the SW region include Manatee, Sarasota, Charlotte, Lee and Collier.

In the SW SCORP region, the Level of Service (LOS) is below the statewide median for the following outdoor recreation sites/facilities: Freshwater beaches; Freshwater boat ramps; Nature/interpretive trails; Historical/archeological sites; and, Horseback camping sites. Heavy demand will lower a region's LOS, as will low supplies of the necessary facilities to engage in an activity. In addition, while the LOS was above the statewide median in the SW region for certain activities, the supply of the facilities/amenities below is lower compared to the other SCORP regions: Paved bicycle trails (5th smallest supply of the 8 regions); Unpaved bicycle trails (5th smallest supply of the 8 regions); Horseback riding trails (6th smallest supply of the 8 regions); and, Tent camping sites (7th smallest supply of the 8 regions). Demand for the associated activities in the SW region is apparently somewhat lower than in the other regions, thus the slightly higher LOS for these activities in the SW region.

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 OGT notes the BR Ranch Land falls within both Priority 3 and Priority 6. It is .1 miles from the Southfort-Sarasota Connector Corridor and 1.2 miles from the Peace River Greenways-Desoto County Corridor (Opportunity Trails). BR Ranch Land is also 1.5 miles away from the Peace River State Paddling Trail (Paddling Trail Priority).

GOAL F:

PRESERVE SIGNIFICANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL OR HISTORIC SITES

Because the tract contains no recorded archaeological or historic sites, it does not meet GOAL F of preserving significant archaeological or historical sites. However, the Division of Historical Resources provided the following write-up specific to this goal:

Map and Description of Cultural Resources: There are no archaeological sites or historical resources recorded on BR Ranch property, however there have been no cultural resource surveys conducted within the boundaries of the project. An analysis of FMSF GIS data reveal that there are 23 archaeological sites recorded within five miles of the boundaries of BR Ranch.

The tract's location, topography, proximity to freshwater, and land use history suggest a medium probability of holding intact significant archaeological or historical sites. Damage to any as yet unrecorded sites is likely minimal as it does not appear that much of the land is heavily disturbed by current land use activities.

Field Observations: Although BR Ranch contains no recorded sites, upon visiting the project, there appeared to be areas of high ground adjacent to fresh water sources that would indicate likely locations for archaeological sites, and given the history of land use in the area, it is possible that the remains of old homesites or ranching operations could potentially exist on the property. When asked, the two land managers and the owner were unaware of any unrecorded archaeological sites located on the property. The land managers did mention one particular wooded area where they believed an old homesite may have been located, given the appearance of the landscape and flora. Given the land management practices utilized and observed condition of the property, it is the opinion of the DHR member of the Florida Forever assessment team that any unrecorded sites would remain relatively protected from any extensive ground disturbance.

GOAL G:

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

The FFME provides that the proposal does meet Goal G. review of the site provided by the Florida

Measure G1:

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

Approximately 2,520 acres (62%) are available for sustainable forest management, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI. (See appendix for more detail.)

Measure G3:

The number of acres of forestland acquired that will serve to maintain natural groundwater recharge functions.

Approximatley 119 acres of forestland(3%) serve to maintain natural groundwater recharge functions, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI. (See appendix for more detail).

CRITERIA

Section 259.105, Florida Statutes

- (9) (a) The project meets multiple goals described in subsection (4). See information provided above for goals and measures.
- (b) The project is part of an ongoing governmental effort to restore, protect, or develop land areas or water resources. If approved, the project would contribute to the larger effort of providing for both restoring and maintaining the watershed that includes the Myakka, the Peace River, and Charlotte Harbor estuary
- (c) The project enhances or facilitates management of properties already under public ownership. It would contribute to a large landscape of conservation lands that includes Myakka River State Park, Lewis Longino Preserve and T. Mabry Carlton, Jr. Memorial Reserve.
- (f) The project contributes to the solution of water resource problems on a regional basis. If approved, the project would contribute to the larger effort of providing for both restoring and maintaining the watershed that includes the Myakka, the Peace River, and Charlotte Harbor estuary. It also serves to buffer the Southwest Florida Water Management District's R V Griffin Reserve.
- (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. The surrounding area is being developed, both as expansion from adjacent urban areas, and expansion of phosphate mining in the area.
- (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. It is proposed for less than fee acquisition.

MANAGEMENT

If acquired as a perpetual conservation easement, primary management responsibility would remain with the landowner. Transfer of ownership would not affect the conditions of the perpetual easements and rights acquired. Periodic monitoring of the site's management to confirm continued compliance with the

conditions of the easement would be coordinated by the Florida DEP Division of State Lands, Office of Environmental Services, though other monitoring options may become available if partnerships develop for acquisition.

FUNDING SOURCES

Florida Forever Program Funds

FUNDING FOR MAPPING, APPRAISAL, NEGOTIATIONS & CLOSING

Florida Forever Program Funds

OWNERSHIP PATTERN AND ACQUISITION PLANNING

DEP Bureau of Survey and Mapping (BSM) notes that the ownership information is based on the Property Appraiser's website and the Florida Forever Application. The BR Ranch is currently owned by Michael J. Boran. It is a 4,041-acre property located in southwestern Desoto County between the Peace River and the Sarasota County line.

Title and Legal Access Issues

BSM notes that access appears to be via County Road 769 and interior private roads. There are improvements on the property consisting of 2 residences and agricultural buildings. Title issues that may be significant in the negotiation process would be determined during the preparation of the appraisal map and title information review.

Jurisdictional and Sovereignty Lands Issues

BSM notes that there do not appear to be sovereignty lands associated with this project. The property appears to be improved pasture and wetlands. There are jurisdictional wetlands located on the property. The limits and area of the jurisdictional wetlands and uplands would be determined during the appraisal mapping

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

BSM notes that the potential easements and encumbrances are currently unknown. Easements and encumbrances of record associated with the project would be identified in the title information and reported in the appraisal map accordingly.

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

BSM found no apparent contamination sites within the project based on the application form and research of the property appraiser's website information. Located in northwest DeSoto County, approximately 18,287 acres of land are part of the DeSoto Mining Project anticipated to begin phosphate mining in the

next few years. Final mine boundaries that determine what areas of the property will be allowed to be mined have not yet been established. The area eligible for mining is 13,948 acres. The mining company is Mosaic, the world's leading producer of phosphate and potash fertilizers.

Legal Issues

BSM noted no legal issues at this time.

Acquisition Phases

From information found in the application and gleaned during the site assessment, the owner expects that the acquisition of the easement would be accomplished in a single transaction.

GOVERNMENT PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT

Contribution to Recreation and Open Space Needs

The Department of Economic Opportunity notes that since this proposal is for a less than fee acquisition, any public recreation opportunities will have to be negotiated with the landowners.

The BA notes that the proposal has a low to moderate potential for contributing to recreation needs.

Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Spaces

The Department of Economic Opportunity notes that since this proposal is for a less than fee acquisition, any recreational open space opportunities will have to be negotiated with the landowners. The BA notes that the proposal has a low to moderate potential of losing significant natural attributes or recreational open space.

Potential for Being Subdivided

The DEO notes that the BR Ranch property has a rich history of cattle-ranching going back over 200 years. This has enabled the owners to generate an income while maintaining native habitats and the local rural economy. The landowners will continue to manage the proposal property for ranchland.

The DEP Bureau of Appraisal provides that the subject site has low to moderate potential for being subdivided based on the Desoto County Comprehensive Plans.

Zoning and Densities within the Project Boundaries

DEP Bureau of Appraisal (BA) notes that the subject site is zoned Agriculture-10. The intent of the Agricultural 10 District (A-10) is primarily agricultural, pastoral, the extraction or processing of non-phosphate minerals, and low-density residential development. This district is designed to accommodate traditional agricultural uses and conservatory measures, where appropriate, while protecting the rural areas of the County. The regulations in this district are intended to permit a reasonable use of the property, at a gross density of one dwelling per ten acres. At the same time, the intent is to prevent the creation of conditions which would endanger damage or destroy the agricultural base of the County, the environmental resources of the County, the potable water supply and the wildlife resources. The first priority of this district is agricultural uses.

Estimated Cost of Appraisal Mapping

The BA notes that the property lies within part of 12 land sections. The total anticipated cost of two appraisals and an appraisal review would range from about \$15,000 - \$20,000. The project consists of 4,041 acres +/- based on the parcel information included with the application. If there were boundary surveys available or other survey information available this cost would be reduced significantly, or the appraisal mapping could be prepared in-house by BSM

Existing Land Uses and Future Land Use Designations

The Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) notes that the proposal is currently undeveloped but is a working cattle ranch. The DeSoto County Future Land Use Map indicates the property is designated Rural Agriculture.

The BA noted that BR Ranch is a working ranch containing several barns, corral, garage, two homes, and sheds. About 220 acres are used for hay fields. Cattle pastures cover almost 1,373 acres of the site. The main entry road to the property is a gravel road that is approximately two miles long. The subject's future land use designation is Rural Agriculture. The intent of the Rural Agriculture Land Use Category is primarily agricultural, pastoral, and rural residential development. This district is designed to accommodate traditional agricultural uses and conservatory measures, where appropriate, while protecting the rural areas of the County. The intent of this category is to permit a reasonable use of the property, at a gross density of no more than one dwelling per ten (10) acres. At the same time, the intent is to prevent the creation of conditions, which would endanger, damage, or destroy the agricultural base of the County, the environmental resources of the County, the potable water supply and the wild life resources. The first priority of this category is agricultural use.

Development Potential

The DEO notes that there is mining and development encroachment and pressure on this historically rural region. As landowners are facing increasing pressure to sell their properties to development interests. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the North Port-Sarasota-Bradenton region is the 10th fastest growing area in the nation. This places additional development pressure on BR Ranch given its proximity to the City of North Port, and City of Punta Gorda, and I-75. The BR Ranch is close to the Desoto Mine, which is expected to commence operation in 2021, a mile away. The ranch is a crucial buffer for protecting conservation lands that offer protection of native habitats, ranchlands and water resources and regional water quality from external agents such as the DeSotoMine.

Placing BR Ranch in conservation protection in perpetuity will ensure the land is guarded from encroaching external development pressures. Conservation protection of BR Ranch is supported by The DeSoto County 2040 Comprehensive Plan, specifically by the Goals, Objectives and Policies within the Future Land Use Element and Conservation Element. (See Appendix)

Surrounding Zoning and Land Use for Lands in Close Proximity to Project:

The DEO notes that the lands adjacent to BR Ranch are zoned Agriculture 10 or Agriculture 5. Just north and south of the subject, zoning changes to residential and commercial uses along highways. BR Ranch is located 7.5 miles from Interstate 75, one mile from the North Port city limits, 12 miles north of Punta Gorda, and 15 miles southwest of Arcadia. The nearest residential developments are about five miles north of the subject. There is significant development south of the subject along Highway 17 and Highway 769. This area is growing with several new developments in the surrounding areas.

DEO reports that, according to the Planning Department of DeSoto County there are numerous commercial, residential, and industrial developments in progress in the subject's immediate area. This area is considered a high to moderate growth area. Electricity and telephone services are available in the immediate area. Public water service and sewage disposal are not available. Water and sewer disposal are handled on-site by wells and septic systems, which is typical for the area.

The BR Ranch is located 7.5 miles from Interstate 75, one mile from North Port city limits, 12 miles north of Punta Gorda, and 15 miles southwest of Arcadia. The nearest residential developments are about five miles north of the subject. There is significant development south of the subject along Highway 17 and Highway 769. This area is growing with several new developments in the surrounding areas.

Transportation Issues

Changes to Transportation Corridors:

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) finds no adverse impacts from this proposal. They note that the proposal is in FDOT's District 1 in DeSoto County, and would protect by conservation easement approximately 4,000 acres of a working ranch that includes a mixture of pasture and native communities, including wetlands. The project lies approximately 5 miles northwest of US 17/SR 35 and the Seminole Gulf Railway line, 7 miles northwest of Interstate 75, and 8 miles south of SR 72. All of these facilities are major transportation corridors, and US 17, I-75, and the rail line are Strategic Intermodal System facilities. We have no issues at this time. There should be coordination with the appropriate FDOT District staff at during the acquisition process to ensure that any issues related to the transportation facilities are addressed and incorporated into the management plan as appropriate.

DSL's Bureau of Appraisal provided additional information as follows:

FDOT District One is doing a Project Development and Environment (PD&E) study of a 2.2-mile segment of County Road (CR) 769 (Kings Highway) from South Kingsway Circle in Charlotte County to Peace River Street in DeSoto County. The study evaluates widening the two-lane road to a four-lane divided highway to handle future expected traffic.

In addition, the State Road (SR) 31 Extension Alternative Corridor Evaluation (ACE) Feasibility Study will identify the need for an extension of SR 31 from south of SR 70 to US Highway 17 (US 17) and evaluate the potential effects of a new alignment. If the project is determined to be feasible, this phase will be followed by the second phase, Project Development and Environment (PD&E) Study which will determine the best alignment for the new roadway. The total project length is approximately 5 miles. The study corridor is located near Arcadia within central DeSoto County

Ongoing Governmental Efforts

To assist in the mission of providing for better water supply, aquifer recharge, stormwater management, and other challenges in fresh and salt water bodies in this area of the state, many strategic properties have been acquired in recent years by various governmental agencies through local, regional, state, and federal land acquisition programs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Consensus among the FNAI, ARC Liaison staff, and the staff of the Division of State Lands (DSL) determined the final project recommendations. Paula L. Allen, with assistance from Zachariah Barton, Office of Environmental Services, was responsible for the overall coordination of this report, with contributions from the following:

Archaeological and Historical-Division of Historical Resources, Josh Goodwin

Forestry-Florida Forest Service, Cat Ingram, Eric Strickland

Government Planning- Department of Economic Opportunity, Dan Pennington

Government Planning-DEP DSL Bureau of Survey and Mapping, Steve Kellogg

Government Planning-DEP DSL Bureau of Appraisal, Frances Alford

Government Planning-DEP Division of Recreation and Parks-Mark Kiser

Government Planning-DEP Office of Greenways and Trails-Samantha Browne

Biodiversity-Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission-Larame Ferry, Jennifer Myers, Cully Lord

Biodiversity-Florida Natural Areas Inventory, Dan Hipes, Kim Gullette, Nathan Pasco

Water Resources-DEP Division of Evaluation, Assessment and Restoration-Terry Hansen

Transportation-Florida Department of Transportation-Jennifer Carver

Regional: Southwest Florida Water Management District-Tana Mason

APPENDICES

Appendix A:

BR Ranch: Florida Forever Measures Evaluation 20190305

ACRES = 4,044

MEASURES	Acres ^a	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	1	< 1%
Priority 3	6	< 1%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	271	7%
Total Acres	278	7%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	427	11%
Priority 5	1,904	47%
Priority 6	24	< 1%
Total Acres	2,355	58%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	2,988	74%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	1,053	26%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	4,041	100%
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)	622	15%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	0	0%
Total Acres	622	15%
B6: Listed Species Occurrences		
G1	0	
G2	0	
G3	0	
G4	0	
G5	1	
Total	1	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	233	6%
Priority 4	1,069	26%
Priority 5	103	3%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	1,405	35%

MEASURES (continued)	Acres ^a	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	1,736	43%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	1,178	29%
Priority 4	606	15%
Priority 5	493	12%
Priority 6	0	0%
Priority 7	0	0%
Total Acres	4,013	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	283	7%
Priority 4	1,180	29%
Priority 5	50	1%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	1,513	37%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	92	2%
Priority 3	956	24%
Priority 4	2,701	67%
Priority 5	294	7%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	4,044	100%
E2: Recreational Trails (miles)		
(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)		
Land Trail Priorities	0.0	
Land Trail Opportunities	1.3	
Total Miles	1.3	
F2: Arch. & Historical Sites (number)	0	0 sites
G1: Sustainable Forestry		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	491	12%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5 - Potential Pinelands	2,029	50%
Total Acres	2,520	62%
G3: Forestland for Recharge	119	3%

^aNumber of acres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted.

Figure 1 Final FF measures table: Report requirement 259.105 (15)d, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

Appendix B:

B1:

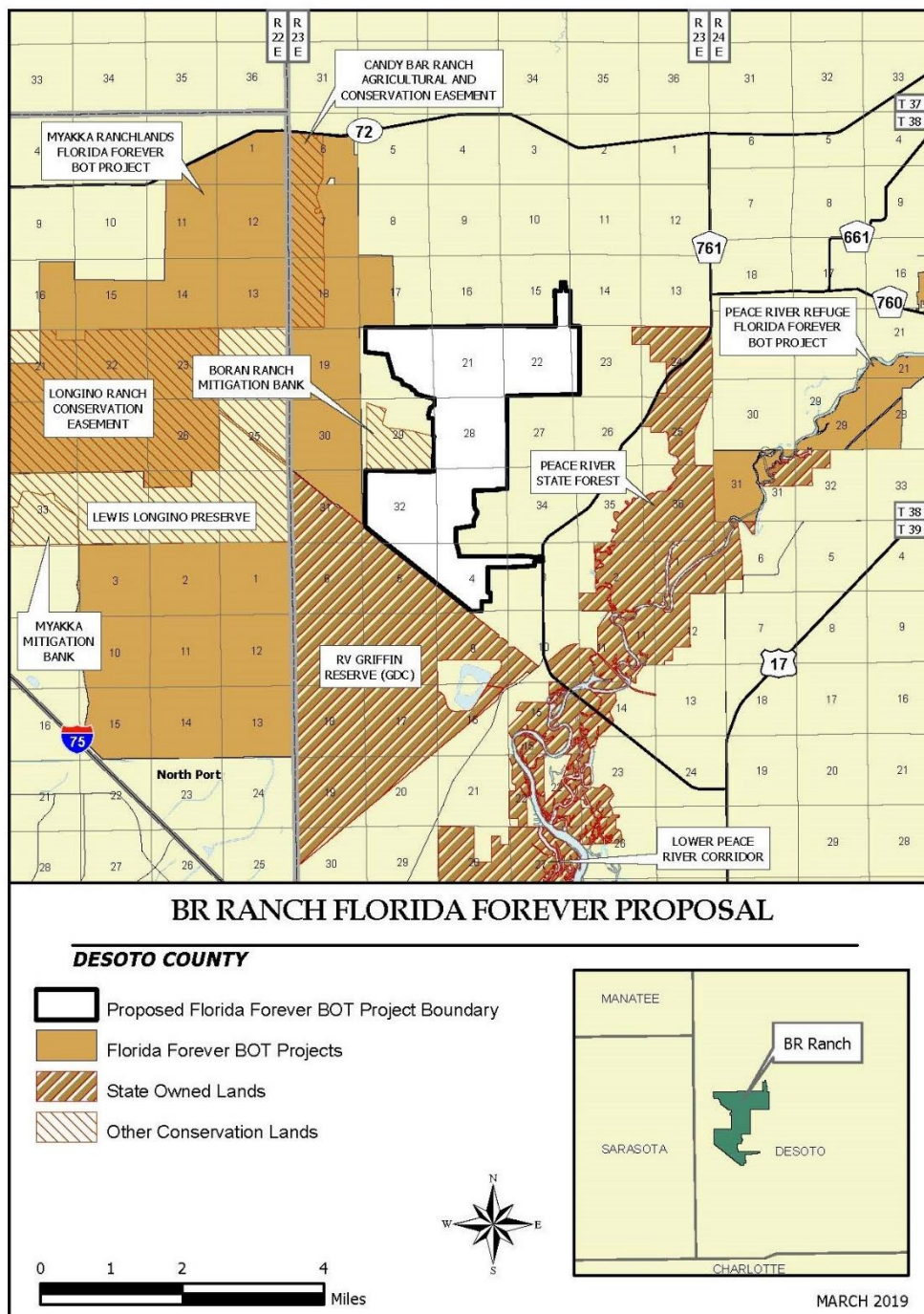


Figure 2 Florida Forever map

B2:

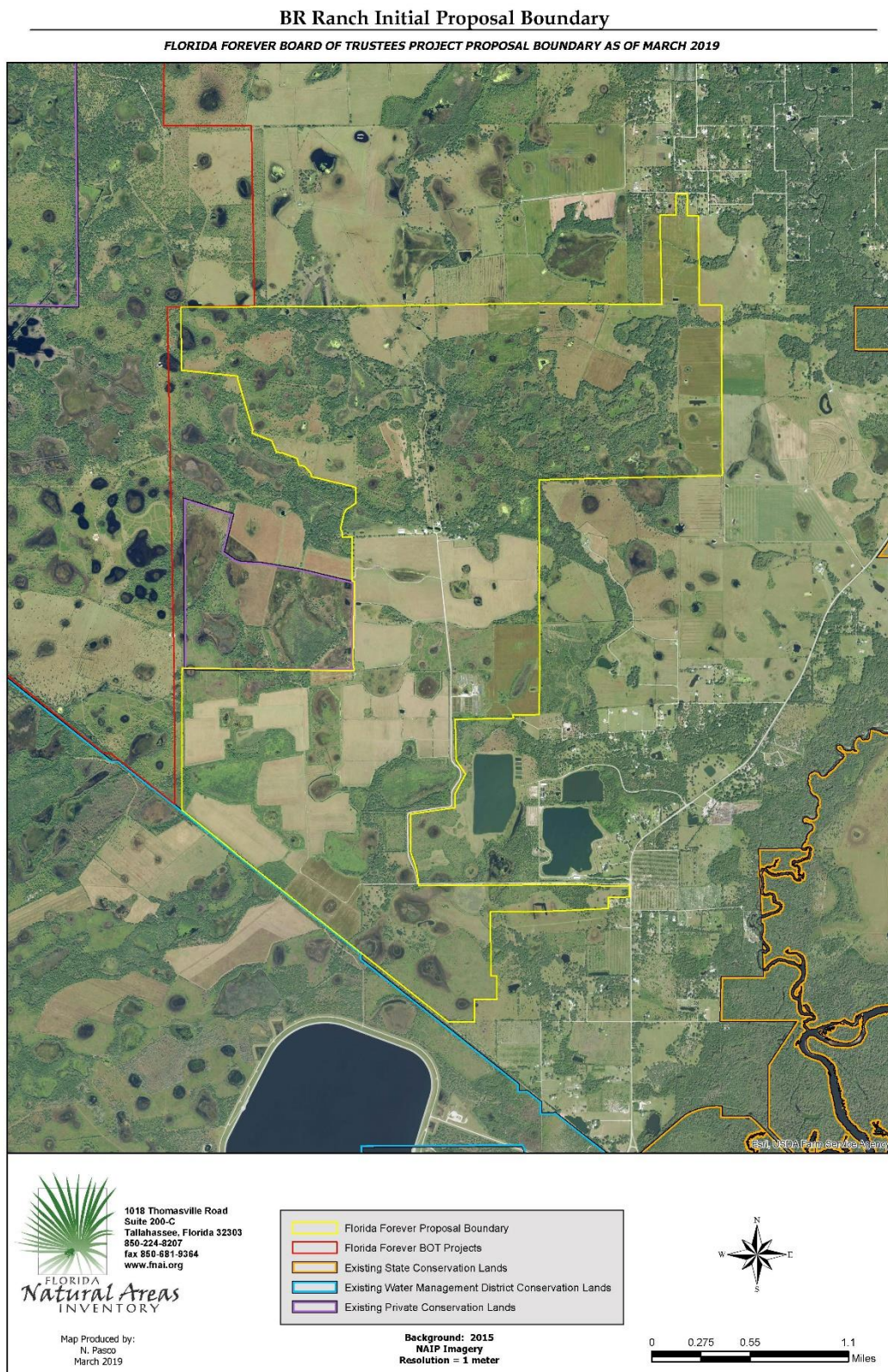


Figure 3 Aerial Map

Appendix C:

PROPERTY ID #'S FOR FINAL RECOMMENDED BOUNDARY

County	Parcel ID	Owner	Acres	Assessed Value	Just (Market) Value	Ad Valorem Tax Value
DESOTO	04-39-23-0000-0105-0000	Boran, Michael	18.16	18,160.00	18,160.00	
DESOTO	04-39-23-0000-0012-0000	Boran, Michael	30.26	121,040.00	2,088.00	
DESOTO	04-39-23-0000-0101-0000	Boran, Michael	25	112,500.00	1,144.00	
DESOTO	04-39-23-0000-0102-0000	Boran, Michael	150.74	527,590.00	9,619.00	
DESOTO	04-39-23-0000-0103-0000	Boran, Michael	112.21	392,735.00	12,738.00	
DESOTO	04-39-23-0000-0104-0000	Boran, Michael	18.78	347,200.00	5,399.00	
DESOTO	04-39-23-0000-0105-0000	Boran, Michael	25	112,500.00	3,595.00	
DESOTO	05-39-23-0000-0020-0000	Boran, Michael	129.09	388,638.00	117,529.00	
DESOTO	14-38-23-0191-00C0-0030	Boran, Michael	5	39,528.00	39,528.00	
DESOTO	15-38-23-0000-0030-0000	Boran, Michael	100	350,000.00	23,976.00	
DESOTO	17-38-23-0000-0011-0000	Boran, Michael	1.4	4,200.00	56	
DESOTO	20-38-23-0000-0010-0000	Boran, Michael	399.6	1,198,800.00	40,617.00	
DESOTO	21-38-23-0000-0010-0000	Boran, Michael	320	960,000.00	51,438.00	
DESOTO	21-38-23-0000-0020-0000	Boran, Michael	320	960,000.00	30,406.00	
DESOTO	22-38-23-0000-0010-0000	Boran, Michael	640	1,280,000.00	81,169.00	
DESOTO	28-38-23-0000-0010-0000	Boran, Michael	586.38	2,377,516.00	1,023,425.00	
DESOTO	28-38-23-0000-0020-0000	Boran, Michael	40	120,000.00	9,139.00	
DESOTO	29-38-23-0000-0010-0000	Boran, Michael	0.46	3,680.00	115.00	
DESOTO	32-38-23-0000-0020-0000	Boran, Michael	580.05	1,167,588.00	95,650.00	
DESOTO	33-38-23-0000-0010-0000	Boran, Michael	280	845,641.00	58,859.00	
DESOTO	33-38-23-0000-0020-0000	Boran, Michael	106.2	377,798.00	122,915.00	

Table Caption or Footnote

Appendix D:

To: Paula Allen, FDEP, Division of State Lands, Florida Forever Program
Through: Dan Pennington, Planning Analyst, DEO
From: Beau Scott, Planning Analyst, DEO
Date: February 25, 2019
Subject: Requested DEO Review and Comments for the 2019 Florida Forever – Cycle 1: Gem Land and BR Ranch FF proposal assessments. Due Date: March 8, 2019
Our responses generally follow from these questions:

- a. Contribution to Recreation and Open Space Needs?
- b. Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Spaces?
- c. Land Use Designations?
- d. Zoning and Densities within the project boundaries?
- e. Development Potential?
- f. Potential for Being Subdivided?

1. BR RANCH – DESOTO COUNTY

Overview

The proposal site is in DeSoto County about 11.25 miles northeast of the City of Port Charlotte. The proposal site is a privately owned working ranch, consisting of pasture and native communities with various flora and fauna. BR Ranch contains over 1,300 acres of cattle pastures. BR Ranch is strategically positioned to protect the Peace River watershed, the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary, and helps to protect the headwaters of two creek systems with substantial and intact watershed, feeding into Horse Creek.

BR Ranch offers an excellent opportunity to both expand protection of a large landscape anchored by the Myakka Island, is an essential link in a corridor between the Peace River and Myakka Island for various species including the Florida panther, will help to protect hydrologic functions in both the Myakka and Peace watersheds and Charlotte Harbor Estuary, and provides an important opportunity to address the current under-representation of conservation lands in the Peace River watershed and specifically Desoto County in a region extremely important for both watershed and biodiversity conservation.

BR Ranch is adjacent to the existing Myakka Ranchland conservation area, a large network of conservation land within Sarasota and Manatee Counties. BR Ranch is similarly adjacent to RV Griffin Reserve, a 5,920-acre property site, owned by the Southwest Florida Water Management District, managed by the Peace River Manasota Regional Supply Authority, for water storage and supplying Manatee, Sarasota, and Charlotte Counties. The proposed Florida Forever project for BR Ranch serves to enhance, buffer and connect nearby conservation lands, and would provide a significant contribution to a very large landscape-sized protected area.

Figure 4 Complete submittal from Department of Economic Opportunity

Appendix E:

Florida Forever Project Proposal – BR Ranch Property

Site Assessment Evaluation Report
FFS Team Members:
Eric Strickland, Forestry Resource Administrator
Cat Ingram, Intergovernmental Liaison

The BR Ranch property is located in southwestern DeSoto County, Florida, and consists of one contiguous, approximately 4,056-acre piece of land. The site is adjacent to other conservation lands. The area of conservation need just to the west of the proposed Florida Forever project is known locally as the Myakka Island. A portion of the ranch's northern boundary abuts lands contained within the Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever BOT Project area. Conservation land adjacent to portions of the subject site's eastern and northern boundary is under mitigation bank designation with Boran Ranch, also owned by the same landowner who owns BR Ranch. A large portion of the subject site's southern boundary lies along the RV Griffin Reserve, owned by the Southwest Florida Water Management District, and acts as water storage and supply for area counties. Several other conservation lands and lands that lie within Florida Forever project boundaries are within close proximity to the subject site, including Peace River State Forest, situated just ¼ of a mile to the east. State purchase of this project would be a good acquisition, as it would protect the linkage between the Myakka Island complex of conservation lands, and the area of the Peace River, an area rich in biodiversity and hydrological importance. The project is proposed as a less-than-fee acquisition. The Florida Forever inter-agency evaluation team toured the property on Tuesday, February 19, 2019.

The local urban area, North Port-Sarasota-Bradenton, happens to be the 10th fastest growing metropolitan area in the country. North Port lies approximately four miles to the southwest of the property and is the fourth fastest growing city in Florida. The northern-most part of the subject property is indicated within the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Bureau of Mine Reclamation Conceptual Mineable Area, meaning that phosphate mining company prospect data indicates that this area contains phosphate reserves which are mineable under current economic and technological restraints, though not permitted at this time. Lands that are currently designated as future mine tracts lie about one mile from the northern boundary of BR Ranch, and mining activities are projected to commence at that location within five years.

The working ranch is mostly within the Peace River watershed, as the Peace River, which supplies drinking water to multiple area counties, lies approximately 3 miles to the east of the property. The property houses the headwaters of two creek systems, both tributaries to Horse Creek, the most significant tributary of the Peace River, which are situated less than a mile to the east of the property. The southwestern-most portion of the proposed property is within the Myakka River Watershed and flows directly onto the RV Griffin Reserve. Water from both watersheds eventually flow directly into the Charlotte Harbor Estuary, a designated Aquatic Preserve, ten miles to the south, and recent scene of the red-tide that has plagued the estuary's waters in recent summers. Freshwater wetlands across the ranch make up approximately 32% of the total acreage. These intact natural communities include freshwater forested wetland, wet prairie and basin marsh, and store water when the Horse Creek and Peace River water levels are high; water is naturally filtered and cleaned prior to it flowing on to Horse Creek. Multiple culverts are used across the site to aid water flow, and a few onsite pumps may occasionally be utilized for pumping water to increase/decrease storage capacity levels before draining to the RV Griffin reservoir.

Appendix F:

**BORAN RANCH
FLORIDA FOREVER PROPOSAL
Fish and Wildlife Resources Assessment
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)
March 1, 2019**

This summary provides a resource assessment of the Boran Ranch (BR) Florida Forever proposal based on field observations during the February 19, 2019 tour and results of the GIS analysis. The proposal includes one property comprised of approximately 4,056 acres in southeastern Desoto County. The BR is bordered to the southeast by the RV Griffin Preserve. The western and northwest boundaries border the Boran Ranch Mitigation Bank and Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever project, as well as a small private parcel. The majority of the north and east side of the BR is private lands consisting primarily of pasture, with agriculture, and native habitat interspersed. Two Florida Forever projects are located within five miles of BR: Myakka Ranchlands and Peace River Refuge.

The BR is comprised of a mix of pasture and native habitat. Open marshes (712 acres) and wetlands (139 acres) are the largest native communities on BR and comprise approximately 18% of the landcover. Mesic flatwoods (538 acres) and wet prairie (129 acres) comprise approximately 16% of the landcover on BR. There are also 526 acres of forested wetlands on BR, which is approximately 13% of the landcover on the area. The remainder is primarily pasture and agriculture. Several creeks and drainages bisect the property. The northern portion of the tract is primarily native, with pockets of mesic flatwoods interspersed with prairie and both forested and non-forested wetlands. The middle and southern portions of the tract are primarily pasture, interspersed with pockets of native habitat.

Fire-dependent habitats observed during the tour, such as mesic flatwoods and wet prairie, appear to be managed with frequent fire. The land manager reports that they try to burn native areas on a frequent interval, and much of the native upland habitat is dominated by grassy species and are well-managed with fire. The land manager also uses mowing to maintain wildlife openings and manage pastures. Wetland habitats are allowed to burn during prescribed fire, and those observed on the tour appeared to be in good condition. Exotic invasive plant species do not appear to be a major issue on BR with cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*) and tropical soda apple (*Solanum viarum Dunal*) reported by the land manager as the primary problems. During the field visit, a couple of large infestations of cogongrass an acre in size or less were observed, as were numerous Brazilian pepper trees (*Schinus terebinthifolia*). Overall, native communities on BR appear to be well-managed and support a variety of plant and wildlife species. Pastures on BR are relatively open, with adequate snags and trees to provide perching and roosting habitat for wildlife and inclusions of xeric habitat.

Figure 6 FWC complete submittal providing resource information from agency data analysis

Appendix G:

To: Paula Allen, FDEP, Division of State Lands, Florida Forever Program

Through: Dan Pennington, Planning Analyst, DEO

From: Beau Scott, Planning Analyst, DEO

Date: February 25, 2019

Subject: Requested DEO Review and Comments for the 2019 Florida Forever – Cycle 1: Gem Land and BR Ranch FF proposal assessments. Due Date: March 8, 2019

Our responses generally follow from these questions:

- a. Contribution to Recreation and Open Space Needs?
- b. Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Spaces?
- c. Land Use Designations?
- d. Zoning and Densities within the project boundaries?
- e. Development Potential?
- f. Potential for Being Subdivided?

1. BR RANCH – DESOTO COUNTY

Overview

The proposal site is in DeSoto County about 11.25 miles northeast of the City of Port Charlotte. The proposal site is a privately owned working ranch, consisting of pasture and native communities with various flora and fauna. BR Ranch contains over 1,300 acres of cattle pastures. BR Ranch is strategically positioned to protect the Peace River watershed, the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary, and helps to protect the headwaters of two creek systems with substantial and intact watershed, feeding into Horse Creek.

BR Ranch offers an excellent opportunity to both expand protection of a large landscape anchored by the Myakka Island, is an essential link in a corridor between the Peace River and Myakka Island for various species including the Florida panther, will help to protect hydrologic functions in both the Myakka and Peace watersheds and Charlotte Harbor Estuary, and provides an important opportunity to address the current under- representation of conservation lands in the Peace River watershed and specifically Desoto County in a region extremely important for both watershed and biodiversity conservation.

BR Ranch is adjacent to the existing Myakka Ranchland conservation area, a large network of conservation land within Sarasota and Manatee Counties. BR Ranch is similarly adjacent to RV Griffin Reserve, a 5,920-acre property site, owned by the Southwest Florida Water Management District, managed by the Peace River Manasota Regional Supply Authority, for water storage and supplying Manatee, Sarasota, and Charlotte Counties. The proposed Florida Forever project for BR Ranch serves to enhance, buffer and connect nearby conservation lands, and would provide a significant contribution to a very large landscape-sized protected area.

Increasing development pressures for new suburban communities from fast growing nearby areas in Sarasota and Charlotte Counties, affects this area of DeSoto County. This proposal contributes to establishing a network of conservation lands that both protect and provide opportunities for restoring water quality and providing habitat for species.

This proposed project meets the criteria and advances the goals and measures of the Florida Forever Program through the following:

- *Goal A) Specifically, enhancing the coordination and completion of land acquisition projects.* The BR Ranch is a Priority 3 ecological corridor within the Florida Ecological Greenways Network, an important connection between the Myakka and Peace Rivers, and other large conservation lands to the southeast, this includes Babcock Ranch in Charlotte County. BR Ranch is a high priority for the Significant Surface Waters layer due to its significance protection of intact headwater creeks that are tributaries to Horse Creek and in turn the lower Peace River. The entire project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition;
- *Goal B) Increasing Florida's protection of biodiversity in species, in the natural community, and at the landscape level.* Most of BR Ranch is in a Priority 3 ecological corridor in the Florida Ecological Greenway Network, while the remaining portion in the Priority 5. BR Ranch is expected to add conservation land to the Peace River Basin, an area lacking conservation lands. Note: The Florida Panther has been reported on many occasions on locations throughout this project area;
- *Goal C) Protecting, restoring, and maintaining the Quality and Natural Functions of Land, Water and Wetland Systems of the State.* About 1500 acres or 37% has been documented as functional wetland in the CLIP Wetlands layer. Most of these wetlands are Priority 3 or Priority 4 with smaller areas of Priority 2 or Priority 5;
- *Goal D) Ensuring sufficient quantities of water will meet the current and expected future needs of natural systems and the citizens of the State.* BR Ranch is known for having a high surface protection water priority, and about 37% has been identified as functional wetlands. Due to the large amount of existing surface water, the land protected by BR Ranch will contribute to the current and future water quality and quantity needs of the region. This includes protecting lower Horse Creek and the lower Peace River. Notable, is the fact that RV Griffin Reserve immediately south of BR Ranch and RV Griffin Reserve was acquired by SWFWMD and is managed by the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority for regional water supply, which means this property likely serves as an important buffer for protecting this significant public water supply.

a. Contribution to Recreation and Open Space needs

This proposal is for a less-than fee acquisition; any public recreation opportunities will have to be negotiated with the landowners.

b. Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Space

As the site is a for less-than fee acquisition, public recreational opportunities will have to be negotiated with the landowners.

c. Existing Land Uses and Future Land Use Designation

The property is currently undeveloped but is a working cattle ranch. The DeSoto County Future Land Use Map indicates the property is designated Rural Agriculture.

d. Zoning and Densities within the Project Boundaries

DeSoto County has designated the BR Ranch as Agricultural 10 District (A-10), which allows for 1 dwelling per 10 acres and potential residential development will allow for 405 units.

e. Development Potential

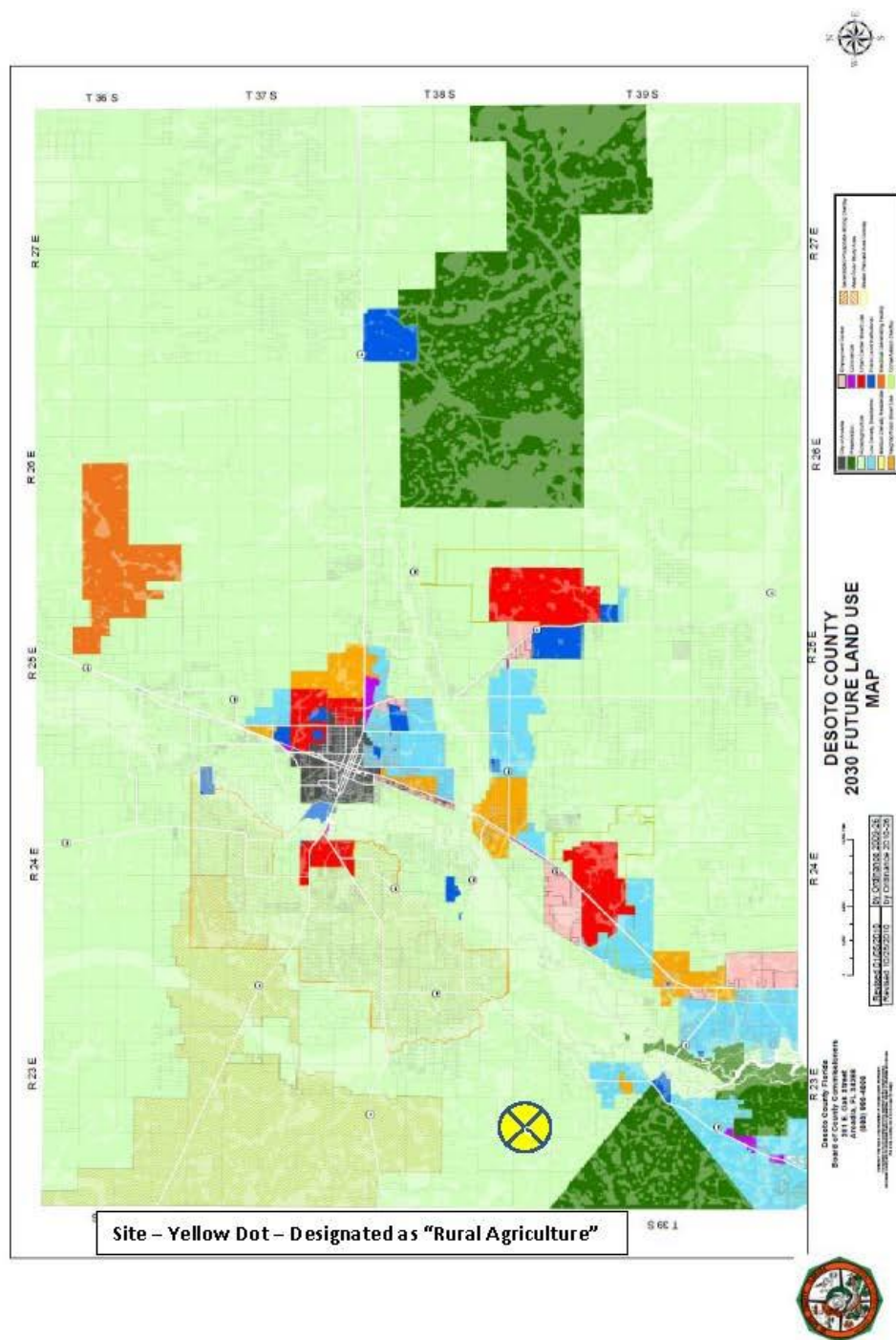
There is mining and development encroachment and pressure on this historically rural region. As landowners are facing increasing pressure to sell their properties to development interests. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the North Port-Sarasota-Bradenton region is the 10th fastest growing area in the nation. This places additional development pressure on BR Ranch given its proximity to the City of North Port, and City of Punta Gorda, and I-75. The BR Ranch is close to the Desoto Mine, which is expected to commence operation in 2021, a mile away. The ranch is a crucial buffer for protecting conservation lands that offer protection of native habitats, ranchlands and water resources and regional water quality from external agents such as the DeSoto Mine.

Placing BR Ranch in conservation protection in perpetuity will ensure the land is guarded from encroaching external development pressures. Conservation protection of BR Ranch is supported by The DeSoto County 2040 Comprehensive Plan, specifically by the following Goals, Objectives and Policies within the Future Land Use Element and Conservation Element: FLU Goal 1, Objective 1.2, Policy 1.2.1, Objective 1.3, Policy 1.3.1, consider Policy 1.3.8, Goal 2, and Objective 2.1, CON Goal 1, Objective 1.2, Policy 1.2.9, Objective 1.4, Policy 1.4.3, Policy 1.4.4, Policy 1.4.5, Objective 1.5, Policy 1.5.1, Policy 1.5.2, Policy 1.5.3, Policy 1.5.6, Policy 1.5.7, Policy 1.5.9, Policy 1.5.13, Objective 1.7, Policy 1.7.1, Policy 1.7.3, Policy 1.7.4, Policy 1.7.11, Policy 1.7.13, Policy 1.7.14, Objective 1.9, Policy 1.9.1, Policy 1.9.3, Policy 1.9.7, Objective 1.10, and Policy 1.110.1 and Policy 1.10.2.

f. Potential for Being Subdivide

Same as outlined in c., d., and e. above.

The BR Ranch property has a rich history of cattle-ranching going back over 200 years. This has enable the owners to generate an income while maintaining native habitats and the local rural economy. The landowners will continue to manage the proposal property for ranchland.



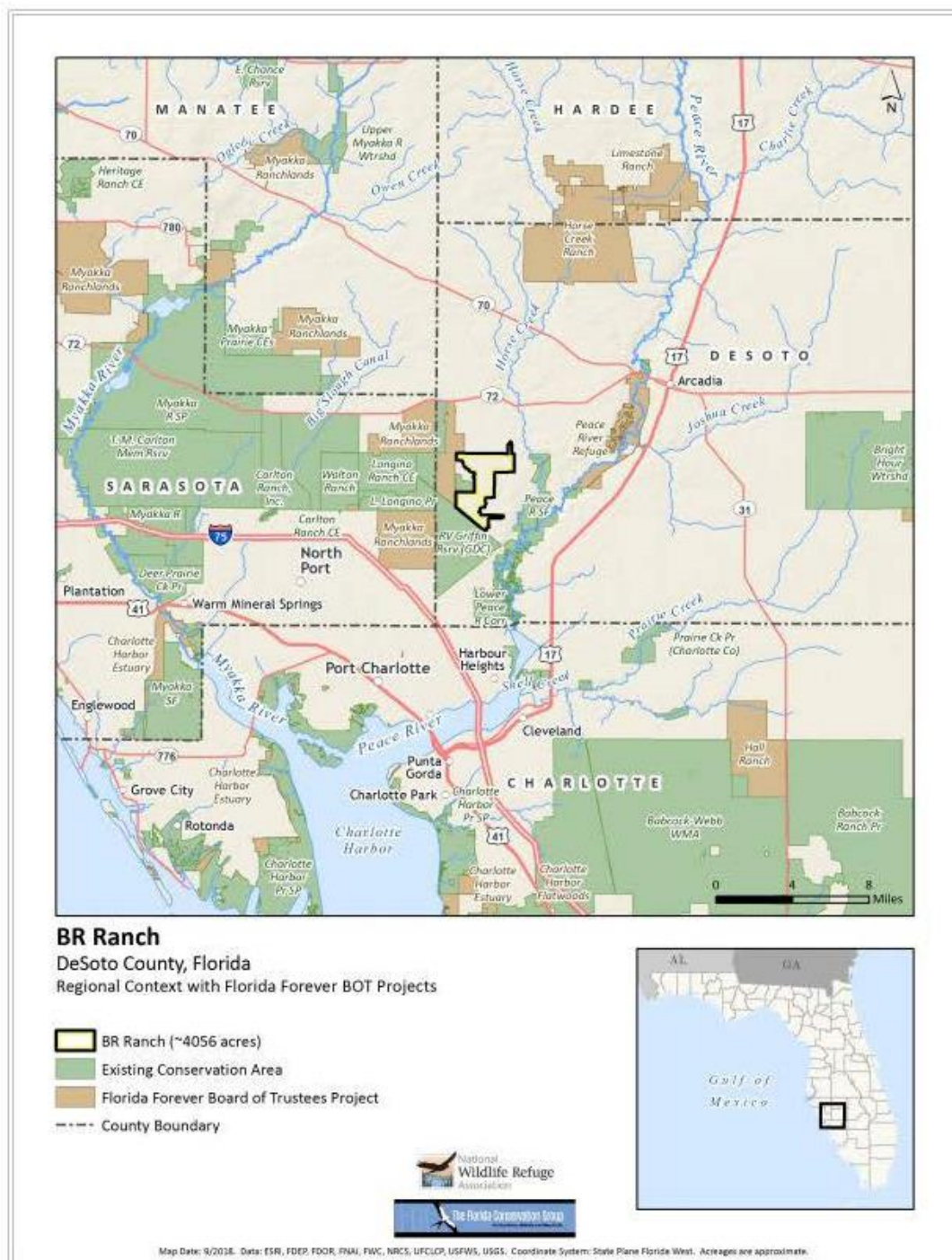


Figure 11 DEO Review and Comments for the 2019 Florida Forever – Cycle 1: Gem Land and BR Ranch FF proposal assessments. Page 5

RED HILLS CONSERVATION

Less Than Fee

Florida Forever Project Evaluation Report

Leon and Jefferson Counties

prepared by

Division of State Lands Staff

Acquisition and Restoration Council Liaison Staff

and

Florida Natural Areas Inventory

DRAFT for April 19, 2019 ARC meeting

APPROVED on

Proposed Land Manager	Landowner
Acres	16,955
Just Value	\$8 million
Application Date	October 2018
Sponsor	Shane Wellendorf, Tall Timbers
Recommended Final Acres	16,955
Final Just Value	\$8 million

Please Note: The proposal size (acres) used in this evaluation was calculated by Florida Natural Areas Inventory using ArcGIS. This value may differ from that reported by the applicant or agency members of the evaluation team

***Red Hills Conservation
Florida Forever Project Evaluation Report
Leon And Jefferson Counties***

Executive Summary

The Red Hills Conservation (RHC) proposal is for less than fee acquisition. It is the collection of three plantation tracts owned by the GEM land company, encompassing 16,955 (GIS) acres in Leon and Jefferson Counties. The plantations are known as Ring Oak Plantation, Cherokee Plantation, and Norias Hunt Club. The total tax assessed value based on property appraiser information is a little more than \$8 million. The proposal lands are located in the Red Hills region near the Tallahassee area, roughly three to five miles south of the Georgia state line. The application was submitted by Mr. Shane Wellendorf of Tall Timbers Research Station. He is the established point of contact for the proposal.

The RHC proposal consists of three plantations. In western Leon County, Cherokee Plantation is located 6.3 miles north of Bradfordville along U.S. Highway 319. The $\pm$ 5,536.1-acre property extends from Lake Iamonia eastward 4.5 miles to Old Centerville Road. Ring Oak Plantation, 5,322 acres, also in Leon County, is located 0.25 miles east of the town of Miccosukee. All of the property is on the eastern side of State Road 59, and the entirety of the eastern border is the shore of Lake Miccosukee. The third property, Norias Hunt Club includes 5,976.4 acres and is located 2.4 miles northeast of the town of Miccosukee along T S Green / Lake Roads. Almost exclusively in Jefferson County, much of the Norias Hunt Club's southern boundary is along the shores of Lake Miccosukee.

Conservation easements near the proposal lands include a $\pm$ 48-acre conservation easement along U.S. Highway 319, protecting the scenic byway from any future development. A second 47-acre conservation easement was completed in 2014 on the only outlet for Lake Iamonia, protecting a vital waterway connection to Foshalee Slough. Additionally, another GEM Land parcel of 1,752 acres adjacent to the proposal is protected with a conservation easement held by Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy.

The purpose for the acquisition of this proposal is to maintain surface, wetlands and groundwater recharge functions, provide for wildlife habitat, sustainable forestry and wildlife corridors.

As privately held plantation, these are timber and hunting lands. The intention of the RHC would be to use the funds from acquisition to endow a maintenance fund for the properties, ensuring their continued operation. Homes on the properties are excised from the proposal boundary.

Generally, there are no imminent threats or current development plans that could impact or diminish the conservation values of the project. All project parcels have land-use classifications as rural or agriculture/silviculture/conservation in Leon County or as agriculture in Jefferson County. However, Cherokee Plantation in northern Leon County, borders U.S. Highway 319, a major arterial roadway that has experienced extensive development pressure within the Urban Service Area of Tallahassee. Northern Leon County in particular is experiencing rapid residential and commercial growth.

The properties border Lake Iamonia and Lake Miccosukee. More than 60% of the acreage is considered to be Strategic Habitat Conservation Area and 50 percent of the proposal is identified as FNAI Habitat Conservation Priority land. The proposal has more than 15,000 acres that fall within the Ecological Greenway area. As for underrepresented communities on the proposal, there are 11,022 acres of Upland Pine, 250 acres of Mesic/Wet Flatwoods, and 171 acres of Upland Hardwood Forest. There is a diversity of listed species. There are 2,264 acres of functional wetlands, 3,205 acres are providing natural floodplain function, all of the proposal provides for aquifer recharge, and all but about 300 acres provide for surface water protection. There are 9,484 acres suitable for sustainable forestry on the site, and there are 9 archaeological sites located here that are on the Florida Master Site File.

The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory shows that this less than fee proposal meets Florida Forever Measures A (A1, A2), B(B1, B2, B3, B4, B6), C (C1, C4, C5, C8), D (D3), and G (G1, G3).

If acquired, this site would be managed by the landowner, and periodically monitored by DSL for compliance with the BOT-approved perpetual conservation terms. The Board of Trustees would hold the easement. Each time the land transfers to another ownership, the perpetual easement and its conditions run with the title. The Board of Trustees is granted the opportunity to exercise its right of first refusal (to acquire the land in fee simple) each time the ownership changes for land under an acquired perpetual conservation easement.is sold.

Since the RHC is in one ownership the entire proposal area should be considered essential, however, the landowner would be open to phased acquisition. Since it is being offered for conservation easement, it is best suited for the Less Than Fee category.

The ARC liaison staff and FNAI staff conducted a site assessment of the proposal on the mornings of January 22 and 23 of 2019.

PURPOSE FOR ACQUISITION

Red Hills Conservation (RHC) is proposed for the following public purposes: (a) Enhance the coordination and completion of land acquisition projects; (b) Increase the protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels; (c) Protect, restore, and maintain the quality and natural functions of land, water, and wetland systems of the state; (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; (f) Preserve significant archaeological or historic sites; and, (g) Increase the amount of forest land available for sustainable management of natural resources.

LOCATION AND PROXIMITY TO OTHER MANAGED AREAS

The RHC proposal comprises 16,955 acres in three disjunct tracts in northern Leon and Jefferson counties, roughly 3 to 5 miles south of the Georgia state line; two of the tracts border Lake Miccosukee along the boundary between the counties (one on each side), and the third is ca. 5 miles to the west in Leon County within the Lake Iamonia basin (specifically along its primary outlet, Foshalee Slough and Lake). The proposal includes Cherokee Plantation (5,536 acres, Leon), Ring Oak Plantation (5,322 acres, Leon), and Norias Hunt Club (5,976 acres, Jefferson-Leon). The site is being proposed for less than fee acquisition. There are more than a dozen current conservation easements, chiefly over plantations that provide timber and hunting (principally quail), in the vicinity.

RESOURCE DESCRIPTION

This evaluation is based on information gathered from the proposal, high resolution aerial imagery, U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) 7.5' topographic maps, Florida Cooperative Land Cover data version 3.2, and information in the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) database. A field survey was conducted on January 22 and 23, 2019 by FNAI staff Amy Jenkins and Katy NeSmith, along with the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) liaison staff and representatives for the landowner.

The properties lie within what is commonly termed as the Red Hills region, characterized by rolling, moderately well drained uplands with clay soils overlain by loamy sands, and isolated lakes and depressional wetlands. On-site elevations range from 100 feet along lakes to 234 feet. Upland vegetation primarily resembles the upland pine natural community, although much of this was altered historically to support agriculture (chiefly cotton). The “upland pine” now growing on former old-fields generally supports a flora lacking some key native components including wiregrass. Although longleaf pine historically dominated the canopy, these sites are now dominated by loblolly, shortleaf, and slash pine,

with occasional small pockets of mature longleaf pine. Numerous agricultural food plots and a grid of chopped or mowed lanes that support hunting activities are imbedded within these open canopied pinelands. The pinelands are generally managed with chopping, mowing, and prescribed fire.

Upland pine areas, which for the most part could be referred to as “old fields”, are dominated by an open canopy of shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*), loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*), and slash pine (*Pinus elliotii*), with smaller pockets mature longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*). In many areas of the properties the canopy supports very large individuals. The occasional open subcanopy and taller shrub layers include various combinations of southern red oak (*Quercus falcata*), live oak (*Quercus virginiana*), water oak (*Quercus nigra*), and sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), as well as younger pines. Winged sumac (*Rhus copallinum*), sawtooth blackberry (*Rubus pensilvanicus*), sand blackberry (*Rubus cuneifolius*), dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*), broomsedge bluestem (*Andropogon virginicus*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), narrowleaf silkgrass (*Pityopsis graminifolia*), goldenrod (*Solidago* sp.), partridge pea (*Chamaecista fasciculata*), bracken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*), earleaf greenbrier (*Smilax auriculata*), and bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*) make up the sometimes dense short shrub and herbaceous components.

Cherokee and Norias, and to a lesser extent Ring Oak, have scattered small areas that were never converted to agriculture and thus the native groundcover is intact. The herbaceous cover in these areas includes slender bluestem (*Schizachyrium tenerum*), wiregrass (*Aristida stricta*), lovegrass (*Eragrostis* sp.), sugarcane plume grass (*Saccharum giganteum*), beaked panicum (*Coleataenia anceps*), and button rattlesnakemaster (*Eryngium yuccifolium*). Young mockernut hickory (*Carya tomentosa*), blackjack oak (*Quercus marilandica*), and post oak (*Quercus stellata*) were also observed in one area on Norias.

While upland mixed woodland was not directly observed during the field assessment and has likely been disturbed through years of agriculture, it undoubtedly occurred in smaller areas on slopes from upland pine to hardwood forest or swamp. Upland mixed woodland can be characterized as an upland woodland on loamy soils with a variable fire return history and an open to partially closed canopy of mixed pines and hardwoods. Typical canopy species include longleaf and/or shortleaf pine, southern red oak, and mockernut hickory. Wiregrass is infrequent in the understory.

Upland hardwood forest occurs on the Norias tract, and is comprised of a rich mixture of hardwood species that cover the slope above Lake Miccosukee. The diverse canopy includes swamp chestnut oak

(*Quercus michauxii*), American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), sweetgum, Shumard's oak (*Quercus shumardii*), swamp bay (*Persea palustris*), sweetbay (*Magnolia virginiana*), pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*), southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*), laurel oak (*Quercus hemisphaerica*), and winged elm (*Ulmus alata*). Saplings of the canopy trees as well as Florida maple (*Acer saccharum* ssp. *floridanum*), redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), and basswood (*Tilia americana*) make up the sparse subcanopy. Red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*), devil's walkingstick (*Aralia spinosa*), bluestem palmetto (*Sabal minor*), and the rare buckthorn (*Sideroxylon lycioides*) were observed in the understory. The rich groundcover includes woodoats (*Chasmanthium* sp.), longbract wakerobin (*Trillium underwoodii*), greendragon (*Arisaema dracontium*), woodsgrass (*Oplismenus setarius*), panic grass (*Panicum* sp.), smooth Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*), southern grape-fern (*Botrychium biternatum*), switchcane (*Arundinaria gigantea*), along with crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*), and earleaf greenbrier. This is also where the Federally Threatened Miccosukee gooseberry (*Ribes echinellum*) is found as small shrubs in scattered locations near the base of the slope extending up to about mid-slope. Exotics were relatively rare and have been effectively treated in the past. Chinese privet (*Ligustrum sinense*), coral ardisia (*Ardisia crenata*), and some Japanese climbing fern (*Lygodium japonicum*) were noted.

Basin swamps are typically large basin wetlands with peat substrate. On the GEM properties basin swamps surround large lakes that border the properties (e.g., Lake Miccosukee, Lake Iamonia) and are pond cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*) or swamp tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica* var. *biflora*) dominated. Dahoon (*Ilex cassine*), southern bayberry (*Morella cerifera*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), sweetgum, diamond-leaved oak (*Quercus laurifolia*), and water oak are occasional species in the subcanopy and shrub layers. The basin swamps observed on the site visit were inundated, and coupled with the winter conditions herbaceous species were extremely sparse. Switchcane (*Arundinaria gigantea*) was observed in the groundcover. Swamp chestnut oak, laurel oak, and Shumard's oak were observed on the edge of a bluff over a large basin swamp on the Cherokee Property (Foshalee Slough).

Freshwater forested wetlands include all wetlands dominated by hydrophytic trees, both cypress and hardwood dominated, and occupies 5% of the proposal. This category can include natural communities such as bottomland forest, baygall, and basin swamp, among others and are combined here because they are often difficult to distinguish via aerial photography and most were not visited during the brief field assessment. A bottomland forest was observed during the site visit and was dominated by a canopy of live oak, water oak, diamond-leaved oak, red maple, and sweetgum. American holly (*Ilex opaca*) and southern bayberry (*Morella cerifera*) were observed in the understory as well as an abundance of vines

including bristly greenbrier (*Smilax tamnoides*), crossvine, and yellow jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*). The groundcover is sparse and contains woodoats and panic grass.

Wet flatwoods covers approximately one percent of the proposal and is located in the lower/wetter upland areas of the properties. Wet flatwoods are a fire maintained and seasonally inundated pineland with an open canopy of mostly slash pine and an herbaceous or shrubby understory.

Basin/depression marshes are herbaceous or shrubby wetland communities with a long hydroperiod and few if any canopy trees. These marshes are generally infrequent on the RHC proposal. One small area of lakeside basin marsh occurs on the eastern shore of Lake Miccosukee on the Ring Oak Property and 16 smaller isolated depression marshes are scattered throughout the three properties and are surrounded by uplands, either upland pine or wet flatwoods. These were not observed during the field visit.

A small area of mesic hammock was mapped on the eastern side of Norias. Again, this site was not visited during the field assessment, but based on aerial photography the hammock occurs around a small freshwater forested wetland. There is a dense canopy, presumably dominated by live oak or sand live oak (*Quercus geminata*).

Just over 20% of the proposal has been either completely converted (i.e., agriculture, pastures, developed areas, roads) from its historical natural community or severely altered by human impacts such as fire suppression or silviculture (i.e, pine plantation, successional hardwood forest). These types cover small and large areas throughout the three properties. A few small pine plantations were observed during the field visit and were mostly planted in loblolly pine. Several of them appeared to have been thinned and/or chopped in recent years. Successional hardwood forest (former flatwoods or upland pine) occurs in a few small areas totaling about 2 percent of the proposal. These areas were not visited during the field assessment but represent areas of long term fire exclusion where a once open pine canopy is now a hardwood forest dominated by early successional hardwoods such as laurel oak, sweetgum, and water oak, among others. Agricultural fields are common on the property and many were dormant due to the winter timing of the field visit. These areas are regularly tilled and planted with non-native agricultural species such as corn (*Zea mays*) and sorghum (*Sorghum* sp.), and contain a number of non-native species such as Brazilian vervain (*Verbena brasiliensis*), sugarcane plumegrass, dogfennel, common ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*), bahiagrass, and showy rattlebox (*Crotalaria spectabilis*) along the

edges and within the fields. Several developed areas were observed including structures, lawns, and the 1.2 mile long mown air strip on the Ring Oak Property.

Natural communities and landcover types within Florida Forever proposal

Community or Landcover	Acres	Percent of Proposal
upland pine (old field)	11,022	65
basin swamp	968	6
freshwater forested wetland (baygall, bottomland forest, basin swamp, etc.)	879	5
clastic upland lake	215	1
wet flatwoods	250	1
upland hardwood forest	171	1
depression marsh	67	<1
basin marsh	18	<1
dome swamp	9	<1
mesic hammock	4	<1
pasture-improved	1,955	12
pine plantation	454	3
successional hardwood forest	304	2
road	175	1
developed	114	1
artificial pond	88	1
agriculture	84	<1
pasture-semi-improved	75	<1
impoundment	50	<1
clearing	25	< 1
utility corridor	18	<1
successional hydric shrubland/forest	4	<1
Total	16,950	100

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.

The RHC proposal could add to 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 because it encompasses 16,955 mostly undeveloped acreage in Leon and Jefferson counties, roughly three to five miles south of the Georgia state line; two of the tracts border Lake Miccosukee along the boundary between the counties (one on each side), and the third is approximately five miles to the west in Leon County within the Lake Iamonia basin (specifically along its primary outlet, Foshalee Slough and Lake).

Measure A2:

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

This is a conservation easement proposal.

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.

Approximately 10,490 acres (62%) of RHC lies within a designated Strategic Habitat Conservation Area (SHCA). As noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI.

The FWC adds that this SHCA provides habitat for species including the Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) and American swallow-tailed kite (*Elanoides forficatus*). The FWC GIS Environmental Resources Analysis report containing more detailed information concerning the FWC's IWHRS analysis, focal species data, SHCA data, wildlife observation data, and other pertinent environmental data is provided as an addendum to this assessment; the maps and charts were made available to the ARC members and staff electronically.

Measure B2:

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

An analysis of priority conservation areas based on Florida Forever Conservation Needs Assessment data may be found in the Florida Forever Measures table in the appendix. Habitat conservation priorities for 281 of Florida's rarest species were mapped and divided into six priority classes. The Florida Forever Measures table shows the acres for each priority class found on the RHC proposal. Overall, the site contains approximately 8,533 acres (50% of the site) of rare species habitat; 43% of the site in Priority 6, 6% in Priority 5, and less than 1% in Priorities 1 through 4.

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.

Rare species habitat based on FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities for 281 species with the greatest conservation need

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	Acres
Forestiera godfreyi	Godfrey's swampprivet	G2	116
Ribes echinellum	Miccosukee gooseberry	G1	68
Stachys hyssopifolia var. lythroides	hyssopleaf hedgenettle	G5T1Q	41
Dryobates borealis	Red-cockaded woodpecker	G3	7,144
Mycteria americana	Wood stork	G4	1,256

The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission also addressed this issue in their review, noting the following:

The management practices employed on the property create favorable conditions for many wildlife species in addition to bobwhite, including the State-Threatened gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*). Active tortoise burrows were observed during the site visit and staff from Tall Timbers Research Station recently conducted a survey to estimate population density on the property and surrounding conservation easements. Establishing the property as an easement would help achieve objectives in the Florida Fish

and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Gopher Tortoise Management Plan that pertain to increasing the amount of protected tortoise habitat on private lands.

Other wildlife species of note observed during the site visit include wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), southern fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger niger*), and wood duck (*Aix sponsa*). Foshalee Slough, which is the primary outlet for Lake Iamonia, provides nesting and foraging habitat for wood ducks and wading birds. Bats could potentially roost in cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) and black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) snags that occur in the slough. Several ephemeral wetlands occur on the property, which provide habitat for amphibians. The wetlands could potentially support rare species, such as the striped newt (*Notophthalmus perstriatus*), but have not been surveyed. The landowner has observed juvenile eagles and suspects that there is a nest on the property, which is likely since the area provides forested habitat near large water bodies. Numerous snags occur on the property due to the landowner's policy of retaining them, if they do not pose a safety hazard. These snags provide habitat for woodpeckers and raptors. As previously mentioned, the property is surrounded by other private lands that are already established as easements. This proposal would provide connectivity of protected lands, which would benefit wide-ranging wildlife species.

Measure B3:

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

If acquired, the RHC would increase the amount of protected area and connectivity between established conservation lands in the greater landscape by 15,315 acres (90%), as noted by in the FFME table prepared by FNAI.

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 RHC proposal contains 11,443 acres of under-represented natural communities including upland pine, wet flatwoods, and 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.

Although strategically placed, the RHC proposal, would not contribute to a contiguous landscape-sized protection area of more than 50,000 acres. However, it would contribute to a near-contiguous collection of private hunting plantations, many with conservation easements in place, in the Red Hills region of Florida and Georgia that covers over 460,000 acres.

Measure B6:

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

The Florida Forever Measures table lists the number of Element Occurrences by Global Rank (G-rank) that are found on the proposal. The table below contains species falling into any of these observational categories, as well as species gleaned from other sources (e.g., Florida Breeding Bird Atlas) with different degrees of locational precision.

Rare plants and animals documented or reported to occur within the Florida Forever proposal conservation need

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	State Rank	Federal Status	State Status
Rare plants documented on site					
Forestiera godfreyi	Godfrey's swampprivet	G2	S2	N	E
Lilium superbum	Turk's cap lily	G5	S1	N	E
Ribes echinellum	Miccosukee gooseberry	G1	S1	T	E
Sideroxylon lycioides	buckthorn	G5	S2	N	E
Stachys lythroides	hyssopleaf hedgenettle	G5T1Q	S1	N	E
Additional rare plants reported on site by applicant					
none					
Rare animals documented on site					
Alligator mississippiensis	American alligator	G5	S4	SAT	FT(S/A)
Drymarchon couperi	eastern indigo snake	G3	S3	T	FT
Gopherus polyphemus	gopher tortoise	G3	S3	C	ST

Scientific Name	Common Name	Global Rank	State Rank	Federal Status	State Status
Macrochelys temminckii	alligator snapping turtle	G3G4	S3	N	N
Haliaeetus leucocephalus	bald eagle	G5	S3	N	N
Sciurus niger niger	southeastern fox squirrel	G5T5	S3	N	N
Ursus americanus floridanus	Florida black bear	G5T4	S4	N	N
Additional rare animals reported on site by applicant					
Crotalus adamanteus	eastern diamondback rattlesnake	G4	S3	N	N
Egretta caerulea	little blue heron	G5	S4	N	ST
Egretta thula	snowy egret	G5	S3	N	N
Eudocimus albus	white ibis	G5	S4	N	N
Mycteria americana	wood stork	G4	S2	T	FT
Peucaea aestivalis	Bachman's sparrow	G3	S3	N	N

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 RHC properties border Lake Iamonia and Strickland Arm and significant portions of the east and west sides of Lake Miccosukee. Also, more than half of Foshalee Slough, which receives flood waters from the Ochlockonee River via Lake Iamonia and Strickland Arm, lies within Cherokee Plantation. Panther Creek and Dry Creek both travel through the RHC proposal properties to reach Lake Miccosukee. These important wetlands will continue to be protected and functional under current land management practices. Restoration may be limited for the site since the proposal is for less-than-fee acquisition. However, the greatest potential for restoration lies in the extensive upland pine areas of the

property. Although classified here as upland pine for the purposes of this evaluation, these uplands have a significantly altered canopy and groundcover composition. Having developed from former agricultural land these areas retain many “old-field” characteristics. Off-site pine species such as loblolly pine, non-native bahiagrass, and early successional native species dominate some areas as a result of decades of chopping and mowing. Restoration efforts in these areas might include removal of loblolly pines, planting native groundcover species, and re-establishment of longleaf pine. Management with fire has helped to retain a suite of native grasses, although wiregrass is mostly lacking and found only in scattered remnant areas that have relatively undisturbed native groundcover. The remnant natural areas would benefit from continued frequent fire and the discontinued use of lanes cut through the areas. If open lanes are desired, the use of mowed, not chopped, methods should be employed to reduce the disturbance to the ground and soil layers. This practice could possibly expand if the properties were to come under a conservation easement. Monitoring and eradication of invasive plant species, especially in the upland hardwood forest where several rare plants are found, would be beneficial. The problem appears to be minor and very manageable at this time; coral ardisia, Chinese privet, and Japanese climbing fern, all Category I invasive species (Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council) were noted during the site visit.

Measure C2:

The percentage of water segments that fully meet, partially meet, or do not meet their designated uses as reported in the Department of Environmental Protection’s State Water Quality Assessment 305(b) report.

The Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration (DEAR) has analyzed the proposals area’s water quality and, in their analysis, the GIS evaluation score is converted to a 1 to 5 value (low to high). In DEAR’s review they identified several aspects about the site. The RHC property is 16,955 acres in the Red Hills of northern Leon and Jefferson Counties and includes 3 distinct properties:

Norias and Ring Oak are on shores of Lake Miccosukee and Cherokee is on eastern shore of Lake Iamonia. Cherokee is inside the Wakulla BMAP boundary and Norias and Ring Oak are in both the Wakulla and Wacissa BMAP boundaries. All three properties would provide both surface water protection for the respective lakes as well as Floridan aquifer protection for the BMAP areas.

The final DEAR Score for RHC would be a 4 (medium high water quality protection).

Measure C4:

The number of acres acquired that protect natural floodplain functions.

Approximately 3,205 acres (19%) provides for the protection of natural floodplain functions, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI. (See appendix for more detail.)

Measure C5:

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

Approximately 16,634 acres (98%) provides for the protection of surface waters, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI. (See appendix for more detail.)

Measure C8:

The number of acres of functional wetland systems protected.

Approximately 2,264 acres (13%) provides for the protection of functional wetlands, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI. (See appendix for more detail.)

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 D3:

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

Approximately 16,928 acres (100%) provides for the protection of surface waters, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI. (See appendix for more detail.)

GOAL E:

INCREASE NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED PUBLIC RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Since this is proposed as a conservation easement acquisition, no increase in natural resource-based recreational and educational opportunities will directly result. However, the Tallahassee Astronomical Society supports the acquisition of RHC because its continued operation as plantation protects the area from light pollution that comes with residential and commercial development. FWC commented that, while the less-than-fee proposal will not provide opportunities for public recreation on the property itself, the protection to water quality afforded by an easement will indirectly protect public recreation sites. For example, both Lake Iamonia and Lake Miccosukee are popular hunting sites for waterfowl and alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*), as well as for freshwater fishing. Gem Land Company has demonstrated a willingness to ensure public access to Lake Miccosukee by selling land to Leon County

to create Cypress Landing and allowing the public to use its road to access Hopkins Landing. There are several existing conservation easements surrounding these lakes and this proposal would fill gaps in resource protection in an area of Leon County with high development pressure.

Upon review of the application DRP provided the following:

The Florida Outdoor Recreation Inventory (FORI) component of SCORP shows that there are two boat ramps on Lake Miccosukee on the Leon County side, one each at Cypress Landing and Reeves Landing. The FWC's Boat Ramp Finder app indicates there are two additional ramps on the Jefferson County side. The Hopkins Landing boat ramp on the NE side of the lake (at the end of Hopkins Landing Rd.) appears to be within the Norias group of parcels (01-2N-3E...). As for the GEM properties, which are located in Leon and Jefferson Counties, they fall into the SCORP's North Central region. Leon and Alachua are the only counties in the SCORP's NC region that are not RAO counties. Most activities in SCORP in the NC region have a relatively high LOS due to lower demand compared to other regions.

However, in the NC SCORP region, the Level of Service (LOS) is below the statewide median for the following outdoor recreation sites/facilities: Saltwater beaches; Saltwater fishing structures – pier, jetty, catwalk; Freshwater beaches; and, RV/Trailer campsites. In addition, while the LOS was above the statewide median in the NC region for certain activities, the supply of the facilities/amenities below is lower compared to the other SCORP regions: Freshwater fishing structures – pier, jetty, catwalk (5th smallest supply of the 8 regions); Historical/archeological sites (5th smallest supply of the 8 regions); Picnic facilities (6th smallest supply of the 8 regions); Paved bicycle trails (6th smallest supply of the 8 regions); and, Saltwater boat ramps (smallest supply of the 7 coastal regions).

DRP notes the demand for the associated activities in the NC region is apparently somewhat lower than in the other regions, thus the slightly higher LOS for these activities.

A wide variety of land- and water-based activities could be accommodated on these 3 properties – among them are hiking, biking and horseback riding; wildlife viewing and nature study; fishing, boating, paddling. Camping is another potential activity and the placement of RV/Trailer sites would need to be evaluated.

GOAL F:
PRESERVE SIGNIFICANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL OR HISTORIC SITES

A professional archaeological survey has not been conducted, therefore it is impossible to determine the extent of the undisturbed cultural resources these tracts contain, however given the known sites, GIS analysis, and field observations, RHC has a medium-high potential for holding unknown significant archaeological sites. As to whether the project might meet GOAL F of preserving significant archaeological or historical sites, it is unclear given that much of the property has not been surveyed and that ground disturbing activities associated with agriculture and forest management will continue. While it appears, based on field observations, that staff endeavor to avoid disturbing historic cemeteries, this did not appear to be the case with known, but as yet unrecorded archaeological sites.

CULTURAL RESOURCES:

While the vast majority of these properties has not been surveyed for cultural resources, there are several historical resources recorded on RHC property. This should not be considered a comprehensive inventory as additional sites are likely to exist in these archaeological rich areas bordering Lakes Iamonia and Miccosukee. Additionally, there are a number of historical resources not recorded with the Florida Master Site File (FMSF) of which property managers are aware.

According to the FFME and also found in the FMSF, there are a total of 9 archaeological sites, 2 historical structures, and 3 historic cemeteries that are either located on or whose boundaries intercept those RHC lands included in this project. Recorded sites on Cherokee Plantation include 4 archaeological sites, one historic structure, and one cemetery. Recorded sites on Ring Oak Plantation include 2 archaeological sites and 1 historic cemetery (located as general vicinity and actually includes 2 separate burial plots). Recorded sites on Norias Hunt Club include 4 archaeological sites, 1 historic structure, and 1 historic cemetery. Cultural affiliations associated with archaeological sites recorded on these properties include Archaic, Norwood, Deptford, Swift Creek, Weeden Island, Fort Walton, and Leon-Jefferson.

While historic cemeteries are recorded on each parcel, the cemetery on Ring Oak Plantation is perhaps most notable. This family cemetery on the grounds of the former Ingleside Plantation contains the remains of Colonel Augustus Alston and his family. A prominent planter, Colonel Alston is a colorful and prominent figure of territorial Florida, known for his involvement in the Second Seminole War, his political leadership in the Whig party, and his duel with Brigadier General and head of the Democrat party, Leigh Read. This duel, which occurred on December 12, 1839, and led to the demise of Colonel

Alston, set in motion a high profile blood feud that would rock the capital city for the next two years and ultimately lead to the growing distaste for code duello in early Tallahassee society.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS: The Florida Forever assessment team did not visit any of the recorded archaeological sites on the property, although there were several locations where the land manager informed DHR staff that artifacts were often encountered by the RHC land managers. In most cases, these finds were made on agricultural plots after plowing had taken place. In the living room of the main lodge on Ring Oak plantation, beneath a glass top of a table are displayed a number of pre-Columbian artifacts that were reported to have been collected on the property. Although not included in the Florida Forever project proposal, the bluff overlooking Lake Miccosukee on which the lodge at Ring Oak Plantation sits, is likely a pre-Columbian archaeological site according to an account from one of the land managers who mentioned frequently finding artifacts during ground disturbance for utilities work. The Florida Forever Assessment Team did not visit any historic cemeteries on Cherokee Plantation although the land manager mentioned that there were three located on the property. There is only one recorded in the FMSF. The team visited one historic cemetery on the Ring Oak Plantation parcel. This consisted of two grave markers. The land manager mentioned that the markers are avoided during mowing and other maintenance activities. It did appear that at least one of the grave stones had incurred some damage although its cause is undetermined. This is the historic cemetery recorded in the FMSF as General Vicinity site, LE4971. The actual location of the cemetery is about one-kilometer West of the General Vicinity polygon for LE4971. FMSF Manuscript #1877 notes, “Two burial plots of the Alston family are located on the former Ingleside Plantation lands at the terminus of an avenue of live oaks leading to the former homesite in an unmarked overgrown plot purported to be the gravesite of Col. Augustus Alston and his family, surrounded by a rusted iron fence. The second plot, 500 feet northwest of the homesite, contains two graves, Arthur Macon and his son, Augustus Alston Macon (grandson of the colonel). These sites provide the only link to the antebellum plantation history of this estate.” The two grave markers do indeed lie about 500 feet northwest of an avenue of live oaks. The land manager did suspect the old Ingleside homesite to be nearby given the presence of the oak avenue, however, he was not aware of any building remains and there was no mention by him of the second set of graves described in the FMSF.

This project’s location, topography, and proximity to freshwater suggest medium-high probability of holding potentially significant archaeological or historical sites. Much of the property is managed upland forest, and disturbance is moderate on the property. Most of this disturbance would be in areas where

agricultural plots are maintained. Within areas managed as upland forest, unrecorded sites should remain relatively intact, but within agricultural plots plowing and disking are likely to disturb subsurface deposits.

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 9,484 acres (56%) are available for sustainable forest management, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI.

The FFS provided the following:

GEM Land Company, the land owner, provides onsite management of all three of these properties, including prescribed fire, roller chopping, mowing, nuisance species trapping, and a small amount of herbiciding on invasive plant species, as appropriate. Portions of the lands are managed for some silviculture with forest sustainability and diversity as the long-term goals. Prescribed burns are the main tool used managing the habitat; managers allow prescribed fire to burn into the wetlands to enhance ecotones and keep a highly diverse plant population which encourages a healthy wildlife community. Broadcast burns are completed with the goal of a resulting 1 – 3-year growth, unevenly dispersed in a mosaic throughout the habitat.

Cherokee Plantation: This property was manipulated by man in the early 1900's for cotton production. Areas of loblolly and short leaf pinelands interspersed with longleaf and slash, agricultural fields, brood fields, and depressional wetlands are scattered across the property. Though managers are slowly moving to more of a longleaf pine/wiregrass ecosystem, where applicable, than has occurred in the past, prescribed burns are set to encourage the survival and growth of young pines to sustain a moderate diversity of the coniferous canopy, as volunteer pines are encouraged. Uplands are populated with various conifers and hardwoods like southern red, live and post oaks and hickories, while wetter areas, drains, swamps, floodplains, intermittent stream channels are populated with black gum, bays, oaks, cypress, and various pines. Conifer ages observed across the property ranged from 2 to 100+ years old. Managers may thin some upland live oaks in the future, as a closed canopy is not conducive to quail, however managers do not plan on removing any of the live oaks from the wetland areas. Most

silvicultural operations onsite consist of habitat enhancement efforts or salvage cuts. In areas near waterbodies, streamside management zones seem to have been well-delineated, so any silvicultural activities may not harm water quality. Many culverts are arranged across the property. Approximately 15% - 20% of the land is in agricultural production. The landowners grow and sorghum to sell to neighboring landowners. Several species of wildlife were observed while on the property including bald eagle, wood duck, hawks, Sherman fox squirrel and deer.

This property is actively managed with prescribed burns; burning occurs over approximately 8,000 – 9,000 acres per year. Managers have altered the burns in the last 10-15 years, switching to a 2-3-year regime to produce more desirable cover conditions for the quail habitat and recreational hunters traversing the property. According to managers, the past season was very good for quail survival, with 10-25 birds per covey. According to managers, 15% of the population gets surveyed, and there are usually quail harvest numbers somewhere between 600 - 1300 each season.

Roller chopping is performed on the property, and invasive nuisance species such as possum, racoon and armadillo are trapped. Little herbiciding has occurred, as there is not widespread non-native, invasive plant species onsite, except occasional outbreaks of bahia grass which deters diversity in native ground cover, and outbreaks of cogon grass, located mostly along DOT right-of-way's. Management costs performed by the land manager occur somewhere in the range of \$70-\$200 per acre, according to the applicant.

Ring Oak Plantation: This site includes a couple of miles of Lake Miccosukee frontage containing scenic vistas from bluffs overlooking the lake. Dry and wet sinkholes with drastic drop-offs pocket the property to add to the collective of karst geologic features onsite. Similarly managed for hunting utilizing 230-660-acre hunt courses (quail) as Cherokee, Ring Oak was also modified over a century ago for heavy cultivation of cotton, etc., and it still cultivated in places today on approximately 1,300 acres total, including milo and corn. Managers of the property wind up putting about 40,000 of bushels of corn back on the ground for the wildlife. Prescribed burns are a major land management tool used to maintain the correct natural communities. Roller chopping is instituted during the dormant season. Panther Creek flows through the property and drains into the west side of Lake Miccosukee. Ring Oak also contains a rather large airstrip that cuts through the northern portion of the plantation.

Norias Hunt Club: This property also borders Lake Miccosukee, as the property's southwestern edge is on the northeastern shore of the lake. This property is also similarly managed as Cherokee and Ring Oak, as it has been used for agriculture and recreational hunting since the early 1900's. Managers employ the same management scheme on this site.

Smaller pine stands are scattered across the site, with selective harvests performed to maintain stands at 30-60 ft² per acre basal areas. Timber harvests are rotated on a ten-year, selective cut basis, as property managers select trees for harvest ahead of time, and mostly choose fire-scarred, or some other kind of issue, trees for the cut. Natural regeneration occurs across the site. The groundcover is a mosaic of native shrubs and herbaceous species and includes areas of natural bluestem diversity.

Measure G3:

The number of acres of forestland acquired that will serve to maintain natural groundwater recharge functions.

Approximately 790 acres (5%) will serve to maintain natural groundwater recharge function, as noted in the FFME table prepared by FNAI (See appendix for more detail). The FFS notes that the lands are these lands are significant to the hydrology of the larger area. Lake Iamonia, which percolates into the aquifer, reportedly drains to Wakulla Springs in 17 days, and last dried up in 2012. The lake is ringed with cypress trees, with taller pines behind the cypress edges. Cherokee contains ephemeral ponds with herbaceous rims that the waters inundate, which is good for the herpetological wildlife. Foshalee Slough, approximately 900 acres of inundated mostly cypress and black gum, covers the entire northern swath of Cherokee and is an outlet for Lake Iamonia. This area has the capacity to hold large volumes of flood waters.

CRITERIA

Section 259.105, Florida Statutes

- (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.

MANAGEMENT

The proposal would be managed by the landowner as a conservation easement. Periodic monitoring of the site's management to confirm continued compliance with the conditions of the easement would be coordinated by the Florida DEP Division of State Lands, Office of Environmental Services, though other monitoring options may become available if partnerships develop for acquisition.

FUNDING SOURCES

Florida Forever program funds

FUNDING FOR MAPPING, APPRAISAL, NEGOTIATIONS & CLOSING

Florida Forever program funds

OWNERSHIP PATTERN AND ACQUISITION PLANNING

The DSL Bureau of Appraisal notes that ownership information is based on the Property Appraiser's website and the Florida Forever Application. The non-contiguous 16,955 (GIS)acres in Leon and Jefferson Counties within the proposed project boundary comprises 19 tax parcels of which all are owned by GEM Land Company. The Cherokee Plantation site contains two tax parcels in Leon County. The Ring Oak Plantation site contains three tax parcels in Leon County. The Norias Hunt Club site contains 14 tax parcels, with one in Leon County and 13 in Jefferson County.

Title and Legal Access Issues

The DSL Bureau of Appraisal notes that the title issues that may be significant in the negotiation process would be determined during the preparation of the appraisal map and title information review. Access appears to be via US 319, County Road 59, Moccasin Gap Road and other public roads.

Jurisdictional and Sovereignty Lands Issues

The Bureau of Appraisal notes that research will be needed to determine the extent of sovereignty lands associated with this project. Lake Miccosukee is a sovereign water body. The property appears to be wooded timberland. There are jurisdictional wetlands located on the property. The limits and area of the jurisdictional wetlands and uplands would be determined during the appraisal mapping.

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

The Bureau of Appraisal notes that the potential easements and encumbrances are currently unknown. Easements and encumbrances of record associated with the project would be identified in the title information and reported in the appraisal map accordingly.

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

The Bureau of Appraisal notes that there are no apparent contamination sites within the project based on the application and research of the property appraiser's website information.

Acquisition Phases

The landowner would be open to acquisition in phases.

GOVERNMENT PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT

Contribution to Recreation and Open Space Needs

The Department of Economic Opportunity notes that the project will preserve 16,835 acres for recreational use and open space. These properties border along 15.3 miles of public roadways where people can view natural habitats, intact forested wetlands, and working rural timberlands. The project would increase opportunities for canoeing, fishing, birding, bicycling, and photography, all of which are possible from Lake Iamonia and Lake Miccosukee and public roads bordering the RHC lands.

Lake Miccosukee offers significant public recreational opportunities. It is a popular fishing lake, known for largemouth bass and bream fishing. In the winter, hunting for waterfowl including ring neck ducks, wood ducks, blue-winged teal and other species is a popular activity. The RHC properties include approximately 6 miles of shoreline along Lake Miccosukee, and approximately 2.4 miles of shoreline along Lake Iamonia. This would significantly enhance the recreational opportunities offered by the existing 11.2 miles of shoreline already under protection by conservation easement held by the Tall Timbers Research Station. The project would help to ensure the protection of the Strickland arm of Lake Iamonia in its entirety. The project would also preserve 846 acres of the Forshalee Slough along the northern boundary of the Cherokee Tract. The slough is the primary outlet for Lake Iamonia.

Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes or Recreational Open Spaces –

The Department of Economic Opportunity provided the following:

Surface Waters - Portions of the Cherokee Tract front directly on Lake Iamonia, which covers more than 6,000 acres, and is largest lake in Leon County. Portions of the project also front on Lake Miccosukee. The project would protect more than 8 miles of shorelines along both Lakes.

The project would help to protect approximately 846 acres of Forshalee Slough which is a primary outlet for Lake Iamonia and can store and hold large volumes of surface water during flooding events. All three properties include small depression wetlands, some of which are isolated, and some of which are part of small springs or drainages. These features frequently provide intermittent streams that drain into

the lakes. These wetlands support wildlife and high plant diversity. There are two named creeks on the properties: Panther Creek on the Ring Oak Tract, and Dry Creek on the Norias Tract. Both intermittent creeks convey surface waters that feed directly into Lake Miccosukee. Both creeks have naturally forested corridors with high wetland functionality, tree species diversity, and habitat for a variety of wildlife.

Uplands - The property contains several small remnant patches of undisturbed native upland groundcover, never used for agriculture. The Gem properties also include a large amount of timberlands managed as a multi-species forest. Southern pines generally dominate the tree canopy. The sustained tree canopy is provided for by the management of the land through controlled burning. The management of this property helps to retain groundwater and support aquifer recharge.

Hydrology - Lake Iamonia and Foshalee Slough are linked to the Ochlocknee River Basin. The preservation of Foshalee Slough is critical to the preservation of water levels on Lake Iamonia. Panther Creek and Dry Creek both provide surface water directly into Lake Miccosukee. Managing the creeks and forested corridors in this project is critical to maintaining the water quality entering the Lake. The Gem lands have a direct impact on the hydrological condition and water quality of Lakes Iamonia and Miccosukee which in turn impact the Upper Florida Aquifer.

Biological Habitats and Listed Species - Gopher tortoise burrows have been observed on the Gem properties (photographs are included in the application). The application also indicates the presence, or strong possibility, of southeastern fox squirrel, Bachman's sparrow, red-headed woodpecker, southeastern pocket gopher, northern bobwhite, common ground dove, red-headed woodpecker, northern flicker, loggerhead shrike, brown-headed nuthatch, prairie warbler, and eastern diamondback rattlesnake. The Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) has identified much of the uplands on the Gem lands as a strategic priority area for habitat conservation. There are numerous wading bird species present on the properties including little blue heron, great egret, snowy egret, white ibis, green heron and federally endangered woodstork. There also migrant bird species that utilize the wetlands and shoreline areas on the RHC properties. The RHC lands also include amphibian species of interest including eastern newts, marbled salamanders, and northern cricket frogs. Some of the steep bluffs along the shoreline of Lake Miccosukee create a micro climate where many rare species exist. The Miccosukee gooseberry is a state and federally endangered plant with only a few known locations, some of which are on the Norias property. Other rare plants that are thought to exist in these same areas include buckthorn,

brickell-bush, Godfrey's privet and Alabama azalea. The FNAI rare species habitat conservation data layer established the highest priority (Priority 1) for sections of the Norias property shoreline.

Potential for Being Subdivided

The Department of Economic Opportunity provided that the Norias Hunt Club in Jefferson County is zoned Rural. The intent of the rural zoning district is to maintain and promote agriculture, silviculture and natural resource-based activities, preserve natural systems and ecosystem functions, and protect the scenic vistas and pastoral development patterns that typify Leon County's rural areas. Allowable land uses within this district include agriculture, silviculture, ecotourism-based activities, very low density residential, and community and passive recreational facilities, and some forms of active recreation as a restricted use. Non-residential uses, except for community and passive recreational facilities that are not functionally related to and supportive of agriculture, silviculture and other natural resource-based activities shall be prohibited within the rural zoning district. This district is not intended to accommodate commercial activities designed to service basic household needs of area residents. Rural commercial uses, as well as restricted uses, may be allowed in this district but shall be limited to the locational and design standards as noted herein. Due to the need to protect and preserve existing rural lands from fragmentation and to promote infill and redevelopment within the urban services area and rural communities, urban services are not planned or programmed for this area. Design standards and development standards for non-residential development and restricted uses, as noted herein, shall be required to prevent encroachment and fragmentation of agricultural uses as well as to ensure compatibility with adjacent uses. The purpose of the rural community district is to accommodate hamlets or villages that develop in an area that is surrounded by very-low-intensity rural land use. This district allows residential development up to four dwelling units per acre. Small to moderate sized commercial development can give local and surrounding rural residents access to basic shopping opportunities. This district is intended to allow for the creation and continued maintenance of villages rather than an urban neighborhood. As such it is not intended to function as a growth node or to contribute to urban sprawl. Central sewer and water systems designed for lower density service may be present or constructed. The Bureau of Appraisal findings supported that of the Department of Economic Opportunity. (See appendix for more detail).

Estimated Cost of Appraisal Mapping The Bureau of Appraisal estimates the total anticipated cost of two appraisals and an appraisal review for each of the three individual plantations would be in the range from about \$15,000 - \$20,000, each. There would likely be a discount if an appraiser were to be awarded the contract for survey of all three plantations.

Development Potential

The Department of Economic Opportunity addresses the development potential of RHC is as follows: The properties in Leon County are designated as Agriculture/Silviculture/Conservation use (1 dwelling unit/10 acres) on the County's Future Land Use Map. In Jefferson County, the property is designated as Agriculture 20 (1

dwelling unit/20 acres). The conversion to more intensive development would require large scale amendments to the comprehensive plans of both counties. There are rural and suburban land uses just to the south of Lake Iamonia which allow development at much higher densities. The Cherokee Property fronts along portions of Thomasville Road (US Highway 319) and is relatively close to the Killlearn Lakes and Golden Eagle subdivisions. This area is also close to the Strickland arm of Lake Iamonia which is vulnerable to development encroachment. While some of the Gem properties are in no immediate threat of conversion, this is not the same for all the properties. Portions of the Cherokee Tract and some the lakefront areas may offer a moderate to high risk of conversion to other land uses in the near future.

The Bureau of Appraisal addresses the development potential of RHC is as follows: The project area is in northeastern Leon County and northwestern Jefferson County, which is an area that is generally rural, dominated by large agricultural tracts, ranches, conservation land, recreational land, and rural residential properties. All the land in the general area has the same or similar zoning and future land use as the project area.

The project area is bordered by similar properties used for sporting plantations. In addition, row crop farm lands and conservation land are located near the subject. There are also rural residential properties and natural wooded areas in the immediate area. Ring Oak and Norias are not in the path of any foreseeable urban growth or proposed developments. New development appears to be very limited due mainly to the unavailability of land. The rural agricultural and recreational character of the area is not expected to change dramatically in the foreseeable future.

Cherokee is located along Thomasville Road and is a prime development site. The majority of land south of Bannerman/Bradfordville is completely developed. The land north of Chiles High School just north of the Bannerman/Bradfordville intersection with Thomasville Road is currently sporting plantation land. It is important to note that the only reason the plantation land exists along Thomasville Road (US 319) north of Chiles High School is simply because the Ingles Family / GEM Holdings have owned the property since the 1930's and 40's before development began to creep north. Had this land been available for development, there is little doubt that it would have been.

Existing Land Uses and Future Land Use Designations

The Bureau of Appraisal noted that all three properties are part of the Red Hills region of north Florida and South Georgia known for rolling red clay hills, historic sporting plantations, and expansive relatively natural habitats. The region is centered along the Florida-Georgia border extending from the Ochlocknee River in the west to the Aucilla River in the east. Over 150 nearly contiguous private hunting plantations cover 460,000 acres across both states. Several of these large estates were assembled

from antebellum cotton farming plantations in the late 1890s and early 1900s. These lands include wetlands, sloughs, and large sections of shoreline along Lakes Iamonia and Miccosukee.

In western Leon County, Cherokee Plantation is located 6.3 miles north of Bradfordville along U.S. Highway 319. The Cherokee property extends from Lake Iamonia eastward 4.5 miles to Old Centerville Road. Ring Oak Plantation is also in Leon County and is located 0.25 miles east of the town of Miccosukee. All the property is on the eastern side of State Road 59, and the entirety of the eastern border is the shore of Lake Miccosukee. The third property, Norias Hunt Club is located 2.4 miles northeast of the town of Miccosukee along T S Green / Lake Roads. Almost exclusively in Jefferson County, much of the Norias southern boundary is along the shores of Lake Miccosukee.

The property's future land use designation is shown below:

Cherokee	Agriculture/Silviculture/Conservation
Ring Oak	Rural and Rural Community
Norias-Leon	Rural
Norias-Jefferson	Agriculture 20

Agriculture/Silviculture/Conservation: The purpose of this future land use category is to conserve large tracts of plantation and former plantation land, forest land, agriculture and silviculture lands and wildlife and conservation and recreational hunting areas is an efficient means of protecting natural resources that constitute important physical, social, aesthetic and economic assets to all the residents of Leon County. Very low residential density not to exceed 1 unit per 10 acres is also allowed within the entire ASC land use category. Accessory uses directly associated with the operation of agriculture, silvicultural, wildlife conservation, recreational hunting and permitted residential uses shall be allowed. Very limited commercial/office uses may be allowed through the PUD process provided certain criteria are met.

The intent of the Rural category in Leon County is to maintain and promote agriculture, silviculture, and natural resource-based activities, to preserve natural systems and ecosystem functions, and to protect the scenic vistas and pastoral development patterns that typify Leon County's rural areas. Typical land uses within this category shall include agriculture, silviculture, and natural resource-based activities. Due to the very low intensity development pattern that is intended for the category, urban services are not planned or programmed for the area. To promote infill and redevelopment within the Urban Service Area (USA) and Rural Communities, higher density residential, and non-residential activities that are not functionally related to and supportive of agriculture, silviculture and other natural resource-based activities shall be prohibited within the Rural category.

The Rural Community Future Land Use Designation is intended to distinguish long-established unincorporated communities located outside of the urban service area. These communities have existing concentrations of residential land use at densities typically less than those desirable within an urban area (gross densities are typically less than 2 dwelling units per acre and the most intensely developed portions rarely exhibit net densities above 4 dwelling units per acre). The intensity and layout of development within these communities more closely reflect rural design characteristics than urban design characteristics, with home sites and businesses typically being situated on larger lots, with greater setback than their urban counterparts, and while some commercial development in these communities occurs in the geographically compact “nodes”, located at or near the intersections of major roads, it is also common to find established existing linearly developed commercial areas along limited portions of State Highway frontage.

The Comprehensive Plan of Jefferson County specifically makes the following statement: “Farming is the basic intent of agricultural land use areas. Residential use is allowed but is secondary in nature and must accept all characteristic farm activities of: noise, smells, dust, spray odors, timber clearing, etc.” The three Agriculture land use districts generally differ in density standards for residential development, some permitted uses, and some setback standards. The intention is to allow the creation of such smaller homesite parcels; however, each parcel shall count as twenty (20) acres for density purposes and shall be reflected in subdivision approval as a decrease in the total allowable developable density of the remainder of the parent tract.

Transportation Issues

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) notes that the RHC is located in FDOT’s District 3 in Leon and Jefferson Counties. They find no adverse impacts from this proposal for the acquisition of a conservation easement over the RHC proposal properties. The proposed project would protect by conservation easement approximately 16,800 acres in 3 separate properties in the Red Hills region of north Florida and south Georgia. One portion of the project lies adjacent to both sides of US 319/SR 61/Thomasville Road in northern Leon County. Other portions of the project lie 1 mile north of US 90/SR 10 in Leon County and 5 miles east of US 19/SR 57 in Jefferson County. All of these facilities are major transportation corridors, and US 319 and US 19 are Strategic Intermodal System facilities. FDOT recommends coordination with the appropriate FDOT District staff during the acquisition process to ensure that any issues related to the transportation facilities are addressed and incorporated into the management plan as appropriate.

Ongoing Governmental Efforts

There are several approved Florida Forever projects already on the Florida Forever priority list that are located in the Red Hills region. These include the Ayavalla Plantation, the Ochlockonee River Conservation Area. The Red Hills Region consists of Florida's Leon, Gadsden and Jefferson Counties and Georgia's Grady and Thomas Counties.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Consensus among the FNAI, ARC Liaison staff, and the staff of the Division of State Lands (DSL) determined the final project recommendations. Paula L. Allen, with assistance from Zachariah Barton, Office of Environmental Services, was responsible for the overall coordination of this report, with contributions from the following:

- Archaeological and Historical-Division of Historical Resources, Josh Goodwin
- Forestry-Florida Forest Service, Cat Ingram, Allen Davis, Tom Gilpin, Heather Schmiede
- Government Planning- Department of Economic Opportunity, Dan Pennington, Dan Evans, Sherry Spiers
- Government Planning-DEP DSL Bureau of Survey and Mapping, Steve Kellogg
- Government Planning-DEP DSL Bureau of Appraisal, Frances Alford, Doug Dane
- Government Planning-DEP Division of Recreation and Parks-Mark Kiser, Diane Martin
- Government Planning-DEP Office of Greenways and Trails-Samantha Browne
- Government Planning-DEP DSL Office of Environmental Services- Ray Spaulding, Simone James, Merrill Emfinger
- Biodiversity-Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission-Larame Ferry, Diana Pepe
- Biodiversity-Florida Natural Areas Inventory Dan Hipes, Amy Jenkins, Katy Nesmith, Nathan Pasco
- Water Resources-DEP Division of Evaluation, Assessment and Restoration-Terry Hansen
- Transportation-Florida Department of Transportation-Jennifer Carver

APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Gem Land Company: Florida Forever Measures Evaluation 20190304

ACRES = 16,955

MEASURES	Acres ^a	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	13	< 1%
Priority 3	9,834	58%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	643	4%
Total Acres	10,490	62%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	60	< 1%
Priority 2	10	< 1%
Priority 3	1	< 1%
Priority 4	103	< 1%
Priority 5	1,064	6%
Priority 6	7,295	43%
Total Acres	8,533	50%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	15,019	89%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	296	2%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	15,315	90%
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)	11,022	65%
Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4)	250	1%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	171	1%
Total Acres	11,443	67%
B6: Listed Species Occurrences		
G1	2	
G2	1	
G3	3	
G4	1	
G5	5	
Total	12	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	832	5%
Priority 2	1,012	6%
Priority 3	1,074	6%
Priority 4	282	2%
Priority 5	6	< 1%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	3,205	19%

MEASURES (continued)	Acres ^a	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	313	2%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	4,777	28%
Priority 5	7,026	41%
Priority 6	1,928	11%
Priority 7	2,591	15%
Total Acres	16,634	98%
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	649	4%
Priority 2	757	4%
Priority 3	682	4%
Priority 4	177	1%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	2,264	13%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	42	< 1%
Priority 2	107	< 1%
Priority 3	3,046	18%
Priority 4	4,441	26%
Priority 5	9,278	55%
Priority 6	13	< 1%
Total Acres	16,928	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)		
	9 sites	
G1: Sustainable Forestry		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	6,856	40%
Priority 3	867	5%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5 - Potential Pinelands	1,761	10%
Total Acres	9,484	56%
G3: Forestland for Recharge		
	790	5%

^aNumber of acres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted.

Figure 12 Final FF measures table: Report requirement 259.105 (15)d, prepared by Florida Natural Areas Inventory

Appendix B:

B1:

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

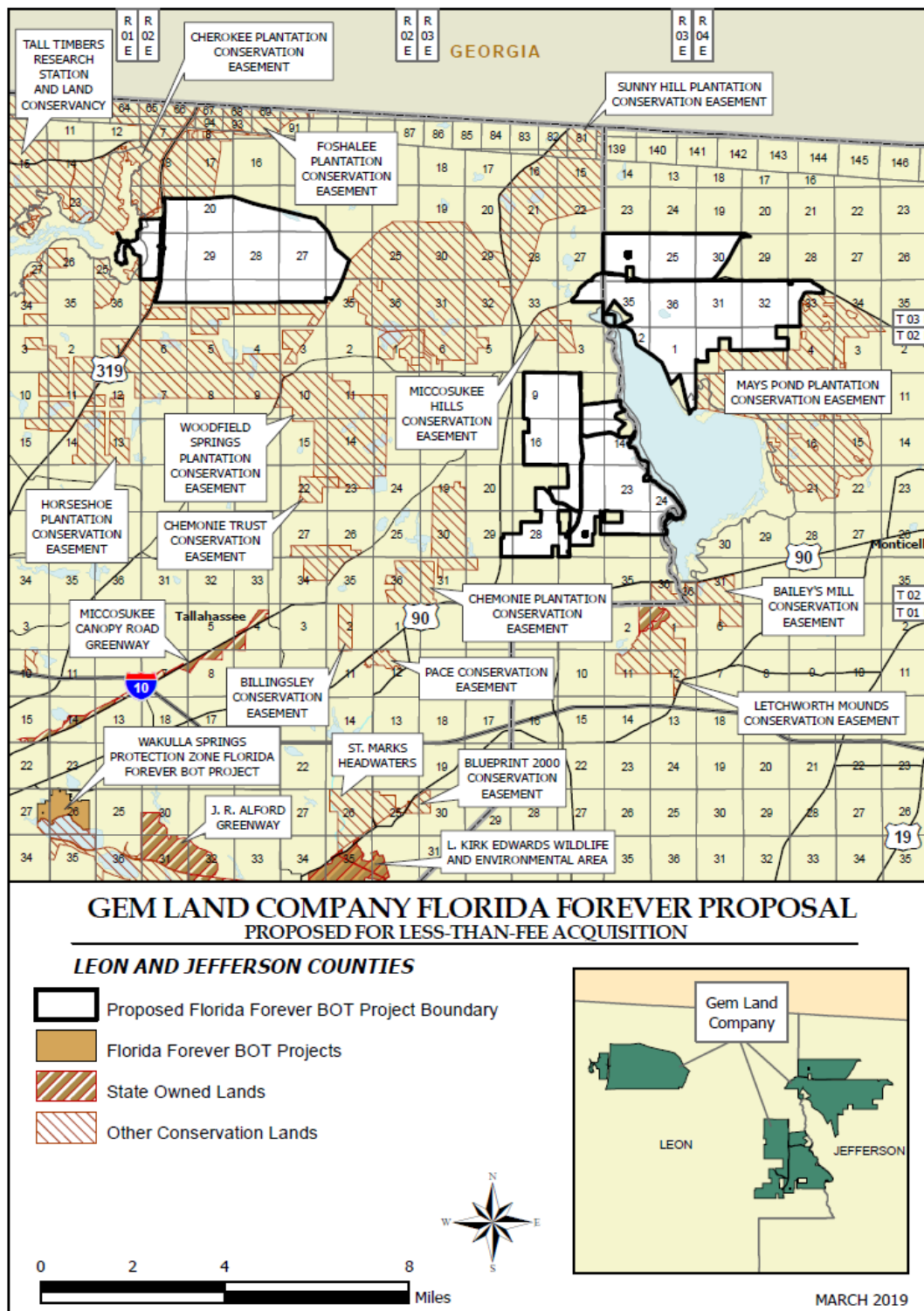


Figure 13 Florida Forever map

B2:

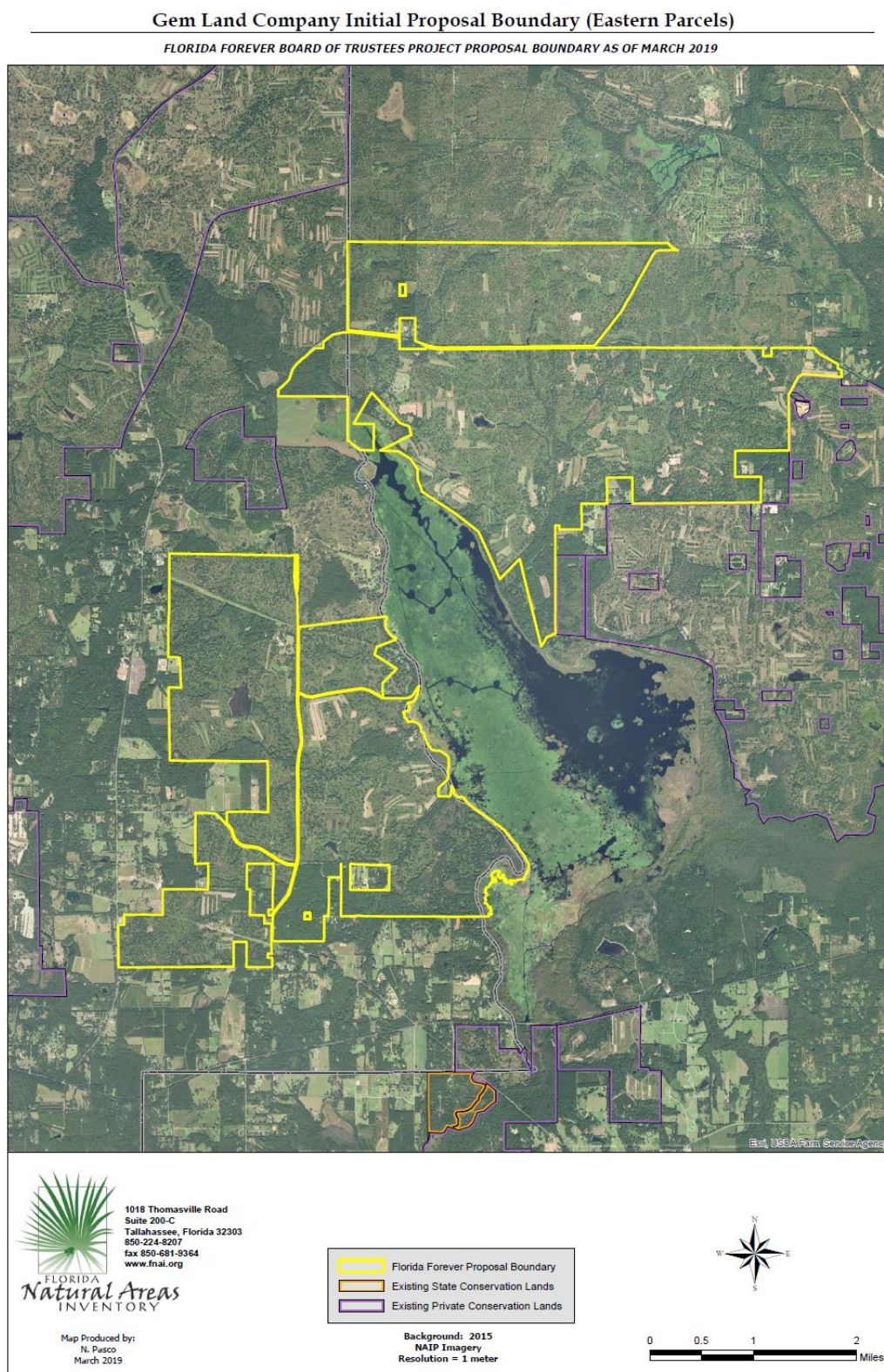


Figure 14 Aerial map (Eastern Parcels)

B3:

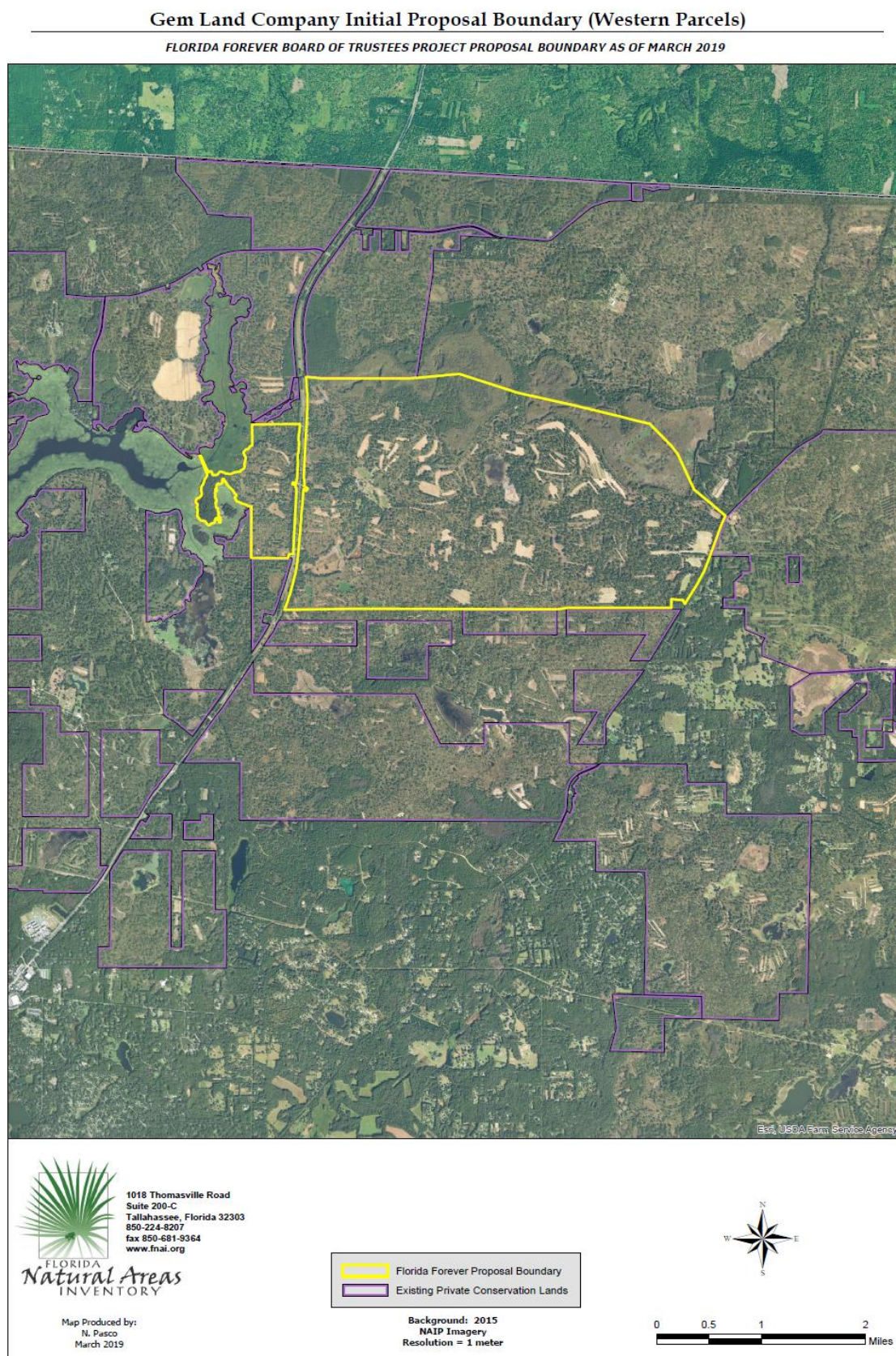


Figure 15 Aerial map (Western Parcels)

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

County	Parcel ID	Owner	Acres	Assessed Value	Just (Market) Value	Ad Valorem Tax Value
Leon	160-920-618-0000	Gem Land Company	4,921.86	2,086,843.00	17,739,256.00	
Leon	161-020-406-0000	Gem Land Company	398.62	194,102.00	1,674,741.00	
Leon	162-720-008-0000	Gem Land Company	2	1,026.00	17,000	
Leon	172-520-002-0000	Gem Land Company	123	30,750.00	492,000	
Leon	181-920-406-0000	Gem Land Company	5,413.06	3,263,875.00	20,345,138.00	
Leon	192-720-406-0000	Gem Land Company	185.18	60,914.00	740,720.00	
Jefferson	01-2N-3E-0000-0010-0000 (4864)	Gem Land Company	867	250,605.00	1,952,790.00	
Jefferson	05-2N-4E-0000-0010-0000 (7725)	Gem Land Company	286	88,065.00	715,000.00	
Jefferson	06-2N-4E-0000-0010-0000 (7732)	Gem Land Company	319	93,070.00	797,500.00	
Jefferson	25-3N-3E-0000-0010-0000 (5110)	Gem Land Company	634	198,245.00	12,680,000.00	
Jefferson	26-3N-3E-0000-0010-0000 (5111)	Gem Land Company	554.51	290,150.00	1,226,130.00	
Jefferson	26-3N-3E-0000-0010-0000 (5113)	Gem Land Company	52.27	13,295.00	104,540.00	
Jefferson	29-3N-4E-0000-0010-0000 (9158)	Gem Land Company	4	550.00	24,000.00	
Jefferson	30-3N-4E-0000-0010-0000 (9166)	Gem Land Company	435	128,626.00	1,087,500.00	
Jefferson	31-3N-4E-0000-0010-0000 (9168)	Gem Land Company	635	184,295.00	1,587,500.00	
Jefferson	32-3N-4E-0000-0010-0000 (9169)	Gem Land Company	634	197,430.00	1,585,000.00	
Jefferson	33-3N-4E-0000-0060-0000 (9175)	Gem Land Company	224.86	208,456.00	702,092.00	
Jefferson	35-3N-3E-0000-0011-0000 (5121)	Gem Land Company	511.6	451,369.00	1,332,882.00	
Jefferson	36-3N-3E-0000-0011-0000 (5121)	Gem Land Company	634	296,156.00	1,370,646.00	

Appendix D:*Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission – Complete Submittal*

GEM LAND COMPANY FLORIDA FOREVER PROPOSAL
Fish and Wildlife Resources Assessment
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
February 4, 2019

As shown in the Florida Natural Areas Inventory Florida Forever evaluation: the Gem Land Company proposal encompasses 16,835 acres (per application; GIS calculated 16,951 acres) in Leon and Jefferson counties, roughly three to five miles south of the Georgia state line; two of the tracts border Lake Miccosukee along the boundary between the counties (one on each side), and the third is approximately five miles to the west in Leon County within the Lake Iamonia basin (specifically along its primary outlet, Foshalee Slough and Lake). The proposal includes Cherokee Plantation (5,536 acres, Leon), Ring Oak Plantation (5,322 acres, Leon), and Norias Hunt Club (5,976 acres, Jefferson-Leon). The site is being proposed for less-than-fee acquisition. There are more than a dozen current conservation easements, chiefly over plantations that provide timber and hunting, in the vicinity.

One key benefit of establishing this property as a conservation easement is the protection of water resources, including Lake Iamonia and Lake Miccosukee. Water in both lakes drains directly into the Floridan Aquifer; therefore, protection of the lands surrounding these lakes ultimately protects groundwater and other connected water bodies, such as Wakulla Springs. While the less-than-fee proposal will not provide opportunities for public recreation on the property itself, the protection to water quality afforded by an easement will indirectly protect public recreation sites. For example, both Lake Iamonia and Lake Miccosukee are popular hunting sites for waterfowl and alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*), as well as for freshwater fishing. Gem Land Company has demonstrated a willingness to ensure public access to Lake Miccosukee by selling land to Leon County to create Cypress Landing and allowing the public to use its road to access Hopkins Landing. There are several existing conservation easements surrounding these lakes and this proposal would fill gaps in resource protection in an area of Leon County with high development pressure.

The property is managed primarily for northern bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*), a species that was observed during the site visit. As such, the landowner burns small blocks on a ≤ 3 -year rotation to maintain the mosaic conditions, open areas, and diverse herbaceous groundcover required by the species. Other management practices include silviculture, roller chopping, small-scale agriculture ($< 25\%$ of the property), and herbicide treatments to control invasive exotic plants, such as climbing fern (*Lygodium japonicum*) and cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*). Overall, the canopy is open and includes a mix of longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*), loblolly pine (*P. taeda*), shortleaf pine (*P. echinata*), and slash pine (*P. elliotii*). The landowner has planted longleaf pine on some sites and expressed interest in converting additional sites to longleaf.

The management practices employed on the property create favorable conditions for many wildlife species in addition to bobwhite, including the State-Threatened gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*). Active tortoise burrows were observed during the site visit and staff from Tall Timbers Research Station recently conducted a survey to estimate population density on the property and surrounding conservation easements. Establishing the property as an easement would help achieve objectives in the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC)

Figure 16 Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission – Complete Submittal

Gopher Tortoise Management Plan that pertain to increasing the amount of protected tortoise habitat on private lands.

Other wildlife species of note observed during the site visit include wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), southern fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger niger*), and wood duck (*Aix sponsa*). Foshalee Slough, which is the primary outlet for Lake Iamonia, provides nesting and foraging habitat for wood ducks and wading birds. Bats could potentially roost in cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) and black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) snags that occur in the slough. Several ephemeral wetlands occur on the property, which provide habitat for amphibians. The wetlands could potentially support rare species, such as the striped newt (*Notophthalmus perstriatus*), but have not been surveyed. The landowner has observed juvenile eagles and suspects that there is a nest on the property, which is likely since the area provides forested habitat near large water bodies. Numerous snags occur on the property due to the landowner's policy of retaining them, if they do not pose a safety hazard. These snags provide habitat for woodpeckers and raptors. As previously mentioned, the property is surrounded by other private lands that are already established as easements. This proposal would provide connectivity of protected lands, which would benefit wide-ranging wildlife species.

The FWC GIS analysis of the Cooperative Land Cover (v3.3) indicates that Gem Land is composed of an extensive mix of improved and natural communities consisting of high pine and scrub (50%), mixed hardwood-coniferous (19%), cropland/ pasture (11%), freshwater forested wetlands (4%) basin swamp (3%), tree plantations (2%), rural (2%), cypress (2%), marshes (1%), transportation (1%), prairies and bogs (1%), with the remainder covering less than one percent of the area. A complete listing of the vegetation and wetland cover can be found in the FWC GIS Environmental Resources Analysis Report provided as an addendum to this assessment.

The GIS analysis of the tract through the FWC Integrated Wildlife Habitat Ranking System (IWHRS) modelⁱ calculates that the tract has a mean value of 4.3 out of a possible value of 10. Approximately 18% of Gem Land shows as habitat for 10-12 focal species, 25% for 7-9 focal species, 43% for 4-6 focal species, and 13% for 1-3 focal speciesⁱⁱ (imperiled or rare wildlife).

Approximately 63% of Gem Land lies within a designated FWC Strategic Habitat Conservation Area (SHCA)ⁱⁱⁱ for species including the Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) and American swallow-tailed kite (*Elanoides forficatus*). The FWC GIS Environmental Resources Analysis containing more detailed information concerning the FWC's IWHRS analysis, focal species data, SHCA data, wildlife observation data, and other pertinent environmental data is provided as an addendum to this assessment.

In sum, Gem Land would protect habitat for numerous fish and wildlife species, including rare and listed species. The proposal would also contribute to the preservation of public recreation sites by protecting water quality. The landowner is already implementing management practices that FWC recommends in order to maintain and improve wildlife habitat. Establishing the property as an easement would support the continuation of these practices.

ⁱ FWC has developed a Geographic Information Systems (GIS)-based assessment tool that incorporates a wide variety of land cover and wildlife species data. The Integrated Wildlife Habitat Ranking System (IWHRS) ranks the Florida landscape based upon the habitat needs of wildlife as a way to identify ecologically significant lands in the

state, and to assess the potential impacts of land development projects. The IWHRS is provided as part of the FWC's continuing technical assistance to various local, regional, state, and federal agencies, and entities interested in wildlife needs and conservation in order to: (1) determine ways to avoid or minimize project impacts by evaluating alternative placements, alignments, and transportation corridors during early planning stages, (2) assess direct, secondary, and cumulative impacts to habitat and wildlife resources, and (3) help identify appropriate parcels for conservation land acquisition, and for wetland and upland habitat mitigation.

ⁱⁱ FWC has identified certain species of wildlife to be focal species which, by their occurrence and habitat requirements, help identify important habitats for many other species of wildlife. Therefore, focal species serve as indicators or umbrella species because of their association with other important wildlife, areas, and resources.

ⁱⁱⁱ Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas are areas within the State designated by FWC as ecologically significant and important for conservation of imperiled species and focal species habitat. They are composed of Grid data representing areas important to flora, fauna, and natural communities based on known occurrence information and recent land use/land cover maps. proposed lands for conservation management that are necessary to protect viable populations of 44 focal wildlife species and other analyzed elements of biological diversity that include rare plants, rare biological communities, and wetlands important for wading birds.

Appendix E:

Florida Forest Service Submittal –Complete Submittal

Florida Forever Project Proposal – Gem Land Company Property

Site Assessment Evaluation Report

FFS Team Members:

Tom Gilpin, Senior Forester

Heather Schmiede, Environmental Manager

Alan Davis, Land Planning Coordinator

Cat Ingram, Intergovernmental Liaison

The Gem Land Company proposed Florida Forever project is comprised of three disjunct tracts located in northeastern Leon County and northwestern Jefferson County, Florida. Each of the three tracts, located in the Red Hills region near the Tallahassee area, are managed as active quail hunting lands with a timbering component. The lands are proposed for less-than-fee purchase. The Florida Forever Evaluation Team visited the tracts on January 22nd & 23rd, 2019.

Located in northeastern Leon County, the westernmost tract of this proposal is known as Cherokee Plantation and consists of approximately 5,500 acres. The tract east of Cherokee and located along the western side of the Leon/Jefferson County line is Ring Oak Plantation and consists of approximately 5,300 acres. The third and easternmost tract is known as Norias Hunt Club, contains approximately 6,000 acres, and rests along the eastern side of the Leon/Jefferson County line, about a mile to the north of Ring Oak. All three tracts combined equal approximately 16,800 acres, total.

Each of the three hunting plantations are within a larger patchwork of conservation lands that is gradually being filled in over time in the Red Hills vicinity situated north and east of Tallahassee. Cherokee is surrounded on several sides by conservation easements through Tall Timbers Research Station. Its western boundary lies along the eastern edge of Lake Iamonia, and similarly managed plantation lands are adjacent to the property in the other directions. Norias abuts similar conservation lands to the southeast, its southwestern border rests along the shores of Lake Miccosukee and is adjacent to similarly-managed plantation lands in all other directions. Ring Oak shares its eastern edge with the shoreline of Lake Miccosukee and is adjacent to similarly-managed plantation lands to the northeast.

Gem Land Company, an established land owner in the region and owner of other plantations in the Red Hills region, provides onsite management of all three of these properties, including prescribed fire, roller chopping, mowing, nuisance species trapping, and a small amount of herbiciding on invasive plant species, as appropriate. All three of the subject properties are managed primarily for northern bobwhite quail habitat improvement and maintenance for the purpose of continued recreational hunting, as it has been for the past approximate 100 years. Grid-blocking is implemented across the landscape as a courtesy to the quail hunters. Additionally, portions of the lands are managed for some silviculture with forest sustainability and diversity as the long-term goals. Prescribed burns are the main tool used managing the habitat; managers allow prescribed fire to burn into the wetlands to enhance ecotones and keep a highly diverse plant population which encourages a healthy wildlife community. Broadcast burns are completed with the goal of a resulting 1 – 3-year growth, unevenly dispersed in a mosaic throughout the habitat. Each of the properties contain functional wetlands and are significant to the regions hydrological systems that link to the aquifer.

The three subject properties each display characteristics of rolling red clay hills and pockets of karst features. Past land uses have altered the composition and structure of the plant communities in the upland areas, however these lands remain to contain an upland pine natural community type. However,

these lands provide valuable wildlife habitat and support a variety of native plant species. Wetland areas across the three properties seem to be in good condition, with little to no alteration of composition or structure observed.

The forest roads which crisscross the properties are for the most part well-maintained with minor erosion. Several sites on the Gem Land Co. lands under proposal are recorded in the Florida Master Site File, including cemeteries, a midden, and a church. As these lands are proposed as conservation easements, no public access will be permitted, however private hunts controlled by Gem Land Company will continue.

Cherokee was the first tract the evaluation team toured. This property was manipulated by man in the early 1900's for cotton production. Areas of loblolly and short leaf pinelands interspersed with longleaf and slash, agricultural fields, brood fields, and depressional wetlands are scattered across the property. Though managers are slowly moving to more of a longleaf pine/wiregrass ecosystem, where applicable, than has occurred in the past, prescribed burns are set to encourage the survival and growth of young pines to sustain a moderate diversity of the coniferous canopy, as volunteer pines are encouraged. Uplands are populated with various conifers and hardwoods like southern red, live and post oaks and hickories, while wetter areas, drains, swamps, floodplains, intermittent stream channels are populated with black gum, bays, oaks, cypress, and various pines. Conifer ages observed across the property ranged from 2 to 100+ years old. Managers may thin some upland live oaks in the future, as a closed canopy is not conducive to quail, however managers do not plan on removing any of the live oaks from the wetland areas. Most silvicultural operations onsite consist of habitat enhancement efforts or salvage cuts. In areas near waterbodies, streamside management zones seem to have been well-delineated, so any silvicultural activities may not harm water quality. Many culverts are arranged across the property. Approximately 15% - 20% of the land is in agricultural production. The landowners grow and sorghum to sell to neighboring landowners. Several species of wildlife were observed while on the property including bald eagle, wood duck, hawks, Sherman fox squirrel and deer.

This property is actively managed with prescribed burns; burning occurs over approximately 8,000 – 9,000 acres per year. Managers have altered the burns in the last 10-15 years, switching to a 2-3-year regime to produce more desirable cover conditions for the quail habitat and recreational hunters traversing the property. According to managers, the past season was very good for quail survival, with 10-25 birds per covey. According to managers, 15% of the population gets surveyed, and there are usually quail harvest numbers somewhere between 600 - 1300 each season.

Roller chopping is performed as a courtesy to the hunters, and invasive nuisance species such as possum, racoon and armadillo are trapped. Little herbiciding has occurred, as there is not widespread non-native, invasive plant species onsite, except occasional outbreaks of bahia grass which deters diversity in native ground cover, and outbreaks of cogon grass, located mostly along DOT right-of-way's. Management costs performed by the land manager occur somewhere in the range of \$70-\$200 per acre, according to the applicant.

As Cherokee lies on along the eastern shore of Lake Iamonia, a sinkhole lake, these lands are significant to the hydrology of the larger area. Lake Iamonia, which percolates into the aquifer, reportedly drains to Wakulla Springs in 17 days, and last dried up in 2012. The lake is ringed with cypress trees, with taller pines behind the cypress edges. Cherokee contains ephemeral ponds with herbaceous rims that the waters inundate, which is good for the herpetological wildlife. Foshalee Slough, approximately 900 acres of inundated mostly cypress and black gum, covers the entire northern swath of Cherokee and is an outlet for Lake Iamonia. This area has the capacity to hold large volumes of flood waters.

The second property toured by the evaluation team was Ring Oak Plantation, which includes a couple of miles of Lake Miccosukee frontage containing scenic vistas from bluffs overlooking the lake. Dry and wet sinkholes with drastic drop-offs pocket the property to add to the collective of karst geologic features onsite. Similarly managed for hunting utilizing 230-660-acre hunt courses (quail) as Cherokee, Ring Oak was also modified over a century ago for heavy cultivation of cotton, etc., and it still cultivated in places today on approximately 1,300 acres total, including milo and corn. Managers of the property wind up putting about 40,000 of bushels of corn back on the ground for the wildlife. Prescribed burns are a major land management tool used to maintain the correct natural communities. Roller chopping is instituted during the dormant season. Panther Creek flows through the property and drains into the west side of Lake Miccosukee. Ring Oak also contains a rather large airstrip that cuts through the northern portion of the plantation.

The third property toured by the evaluation team was Norias Plantation, which also lies on Lake Miccosukee, as the property's southwestern edge is on the northeastern shore of the lake. This property is also similarly managed as Cherokee and Ring Oak, as it has been used for agriculture and recreational hunting since the early 1900's. Managers employ the same management scheme on this site.

Smaller pine stands are scattered across the site, with selective harvests performed to maintain stands at 30-60 ft² per acre basal areas. Timber harvests are rotated on a ten-year, selective cut basis, as property managers select trees for harvest ahead of time, and mostly choose fire-scarred, or some other kind of issue, trees for the cut. Natural regeneration occurs across the site. The groundcover is a mosaic of native shrubs and herbaceous species and includes areas of natural bluestem diversity. Little non-native, invasive plant species in the form of small, isolated patches of coral ardisia and Japanese climbing fern were observed onsite, as well as a few small areas of bahia grass.

Approximately 15% - 20% of the site is in agricultural development (corn), though fields are rotated/not planted every year. Dry Creek runs through the property to the north edge of Lake Miccosukee. Depressional wetlands with Shumard and black oaks and gum exist, as do dry and wet sinks. Plant species of note were observed by the evaluation team at the time of site tour including the federally endangered local species of gooseberry, Godfrey's privet, Alabama azalea and buckthorn. A bald eagle's nest and gopher tortoise burrow were noticed during the time of site reconnaissance.

Management activities as currently implemented across the three properties should not impact listed species if applicable best management practices (BMPs) are utilized. Consultation with the appropriate authority (FWC, USFWS) is encouraged prior to conducting management activities that may adversely impact listed species (silvicultural activities simultaneous as nesting season, etc.). No BMP infractions, as it relates to silviculture, were observed on either three of the sites.

The addition of this proposed project to the Florida Forever Acquisition Priority List as a less-than-fee acquisition is a no-brainer. The protection of over 16,000 acres of strategically connective conservation lands in the region will ensure the long-term viability to the essential hydrological functions occurring in the region, as well as the ongoing enhancement of the natural wildlife habitat.

Appendix F:
Department of Economic Opportunity -Complete submittal

To: Paul Allen, FDEP, Division of State Lands, Florida Forever Program
 Through: Sherry Spiers, Regional Planning Administrator
 From: Dan Evans, Planning Analyst, DEO
 Date: March 4, 2019
 Subject: Application to Add New Project to the Florida Forever List for the Gem Land Company

Overview

The GEM Land Company project consists of 3 properties in Leon and Jefferson Counties proposed for less than fee simple acquisition to protect the rural character and natural resources of these properties. In western Leon County, the Cherokee Plantation property is located 6.3 miles north of Bradfordville along US Highway 319. The property consists of approximately 5,536.1 acres extending from Lake Iamonia eastward 4.5 miles to Old Centerville Road. The Ring Oak Plantation consists of approximately 5,322.5 acres located in Leon County east of the Community of Miccosukee. All this property is on the eastern side of SR 59, and the eastern border fronts along Lake Miccosukee. The third property, Norias Hunt Club, includes 5,976.4 acres and is located 2.4 miles northeast of the Town of Miccosukee along TS Green and Lake Roads. The property is located almost exclusively in Jefferson County. Much of the Norias Hunt Club property's southern boundary fronts along the shore of Lake Miccosukee. In total, the project involves 16,835 acres.

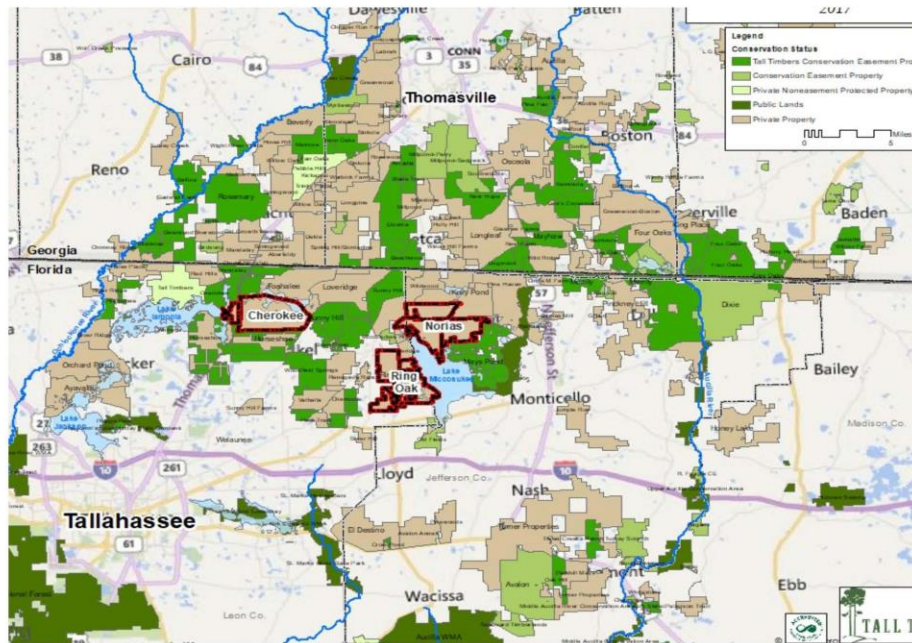


Figure 22 Department of Economic Opportunity -Complete submittal

Contribution to Recreation and Open Space

The project will preserve 16,835 acres for recreational use and open space. These properties border along 15.3 miles of public roadways where people can view natural habitats, intact forested wetlands, and working rural timberlands. The project would increase opportunities for canoeing, fishing, birding, bicycling, and photography, all of which are possible from Lake Iamonia and Lake Miccosukee and public roads bordering the Gem company lands.

Lake Miccosukee offers significant public recreational opportunities. It is a popular fishing lake, known for largemouth bass and bream fishing. In the winter, hunting for waterfowl including ring neck ducks, wood ducks, blue-winged teal and other species is a popular activity. The Gem properties include approximately 6 miles of shoreline along Lake Miccosukee, and approximately 2.4 miles of shoreline along Lake Iamonia. This would significantly enhance the recreational opportunities offered by the existing 11.2 miles of shoreline already under protection by conservation easement held by the Tall Timbers Research Station. The project would help to ensure the protection of the Strickland arm of Lake Iamonia in its entirety. The project would also preserve 846 acres of the Forshalee Slough along the northern boundary of the Cherokee Tract. The slough is the primary outlet for Lake Iamonia.

The Potential for Losing Significant Natural Attributes

Surface Waters - Portions of the Cherokee Tract front directly on Lake Iamonia, which covers more than 6,000 acres, and is largest lake in Leon County. Portions of the project also front on Lake Miccosukee. The project would protect more than 8 miles of shorelines along both Lakes.

Wetlands - The project would help to protect approximately 846 acres of Foshalee Slough which is a primary outlet for Lake Iamonia and can store and hold large volumes of surface water during flooding events. All three properties include small depression wetlands, some of which are isolated, and some of which are part of small springs or drainages. These features frequently provide intermittent streams that drain into the lakes. These wetlands support wildlife and high plant diversity. There are two named creeks on the properties: Panther Creek on the Ring Oak Tract, and Dry Creek on the Norias Tract. Both intermittent creeks convey surface waters that feed directly into Lake Miccosukee. Both creeks have naturally forested corridors with high wetland functionality, tree species diversity, and habitat for a variety of wildlife.

Uplands - The property contains several small remnant patches of undisturbed native upland groundcover, never used for agriculture. The Gem properties also include a large amount of timberlands managed as a multi-species forest. Southern pines generally dominate the tree canopy. The sustained tree canopy is provided for by the management of the land through controlled burning. The management of this property helps to retain groundwater and support aquifer recharge.

Hydrology - Lake Iamonia and Foshalee Slough are linked to the Ochlocknee River Basin. The preservation of Foshalee Slough is critical to the preservation of water levels on Lake Iamonia. Panther Creek and Dry Creek both provide surface water directly into Lake Miccosukee. Managing the creeks and forested corridors in this project is critical to maintaining the water quality entering the Lake. The Gem lands have a direct impact on the hydrological condition and water quality of Lakes Iamonia and Miccosukee which in turn impact the Upper Florida Aquifer.

Biological Habitats and Listed Species - Gopher tortoise burrows have been observed on the Gem properties (photographs are included in the application). The application also indicates the presence, or strong possibility, of southeastern fox squirrel, Bachman's sparrow, red-headed woodpecker, southeastern pocket gopher, northern bobwhite, common ground dove, red-headed woodpecker, northern flicker, loggerhead shrike, brown-headed nuthatch, prairie warbler, and eastern diamondback rattlesnake. The Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) has identified much of the uplands on the Gem lands as a strategic priority area for habitat conservation. There are numerous wading bird species present on the properties including little blue heron, great egret, snowy egret, white ibis, green heron and federally endangered woodstork. There also migrant bird species that utilize the wetlands and shoreline areas on the Gem properties. The Gem lands also include amphibian species of interest including eastern newts, marbled salamanders, and northern cricket frogs. Some of the steep bluffs along the shoreline of Lake Miccosukee create a micro climate where many rare species exist. The Miccosukee gooseberry is a state and federally endangered plant with only a few known locations, some of which are on the Norias property. Other rare plants that are thought to exist in these same areas include buckthorn, brickell-bush, Godfrey's privet and Alabama azalea. The FNAI rare species habitat conservation data layer established the highest priority (Priority 1) for sections of the Norias property shoreline.

Land Use and the Potential for Development

The properties in Leon County are designated as Agriculture/Silviculture/Conservation use (1 dwelling unit/10 acres) on the County's Future Land Use Map. In Jefferson County, the property is designated as Agriculture 20 (1 dwelling unit/20 acres). The conversion to more intensive development would require large scale amendments to the comprehensive plans of both counties. There are rural and suburban land uses just to the south of Lake Iamonia which allow development at much higher densities. The Cherokee Property fronts along portions of Thomasville Road (US Highway 319) and is relatively close to the Killearn Lakes and Golden Eagle subdivisions. This area is also close to the Strickland arm of Lake Iamonia which is vulnerable to development encroachment. While some of the Gem properties are in no immediate threat of conversion, this is not the same for all the properties. Portions of the Cherokee Tract and some the lakefront areas may offer a moderate to high risk of conversion to other land uses in the near future.

Local Government Support for the Application

The application is supported by a letter from Mr. Bryan Deslodge, Leon County Commissioner, District 4. District 4 is the district where the Cherokee and Ring Oak Plantation tracts are located. The letter endorses the project because it is critical in providing recreation opportunities, critical for groundwater recharge, and generally beneficial for the entire county.

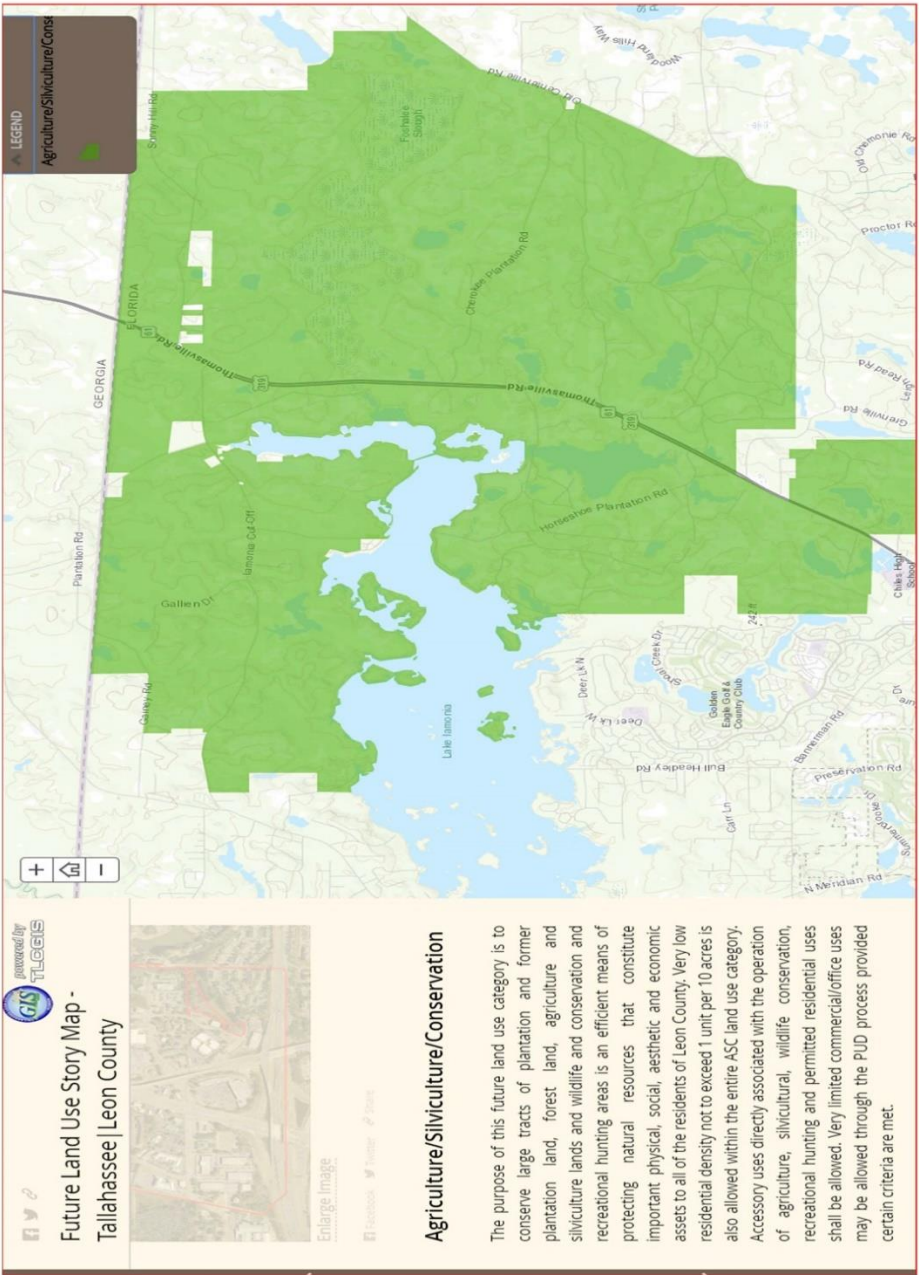


Figure 1: Leon County Future Land Use Map - Showing area of the Cherokee parcel, designated Agricultural/Silvicultural/Conservation

Figure 25 Department of Economic Opportunity -Complete submittal

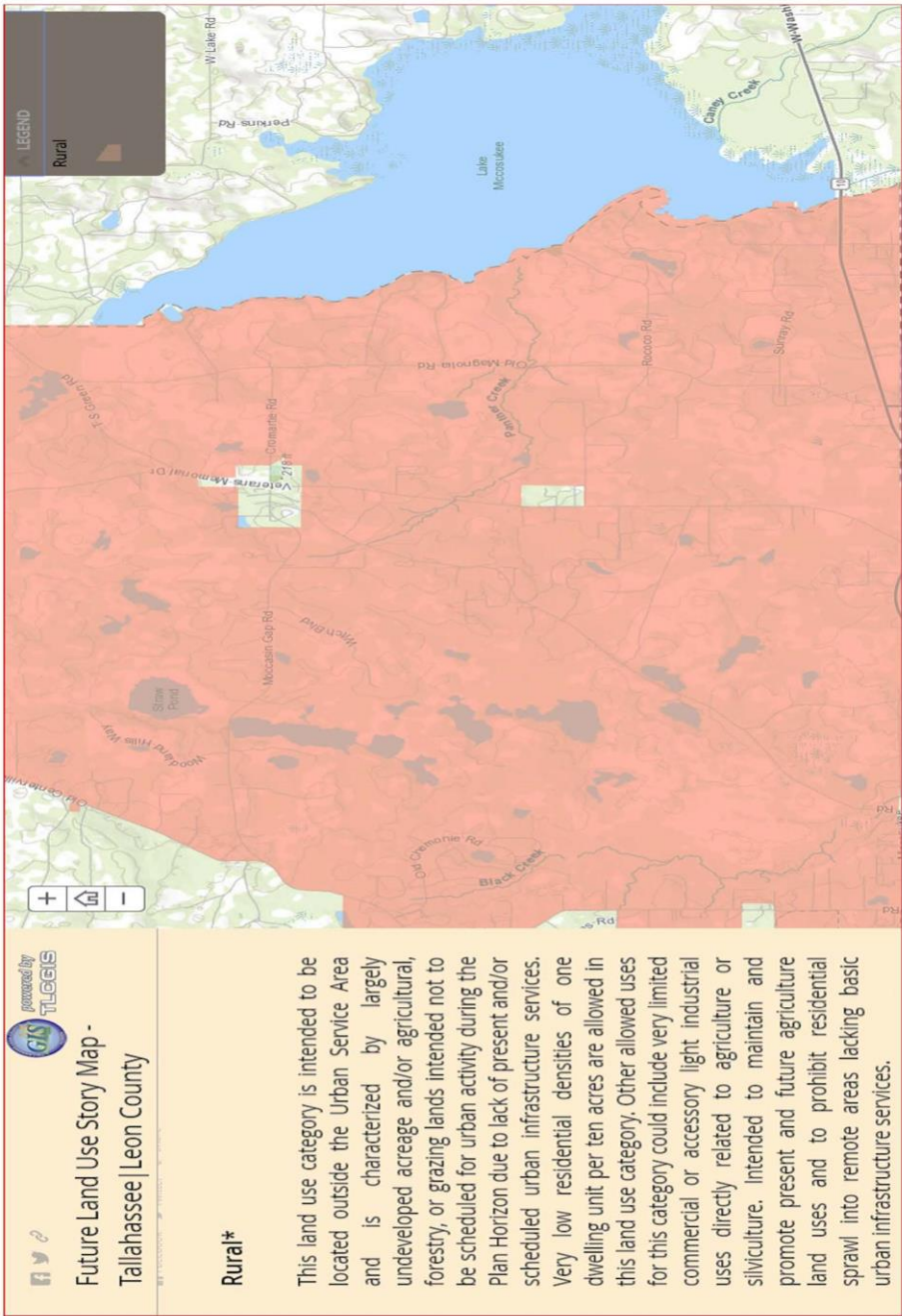


Figure 2: Leon County Future Land Use Map - Showing the Ring Oak parcel, designated Rural.

Figure 26 Department of Economic Opportunity -Complete submittal

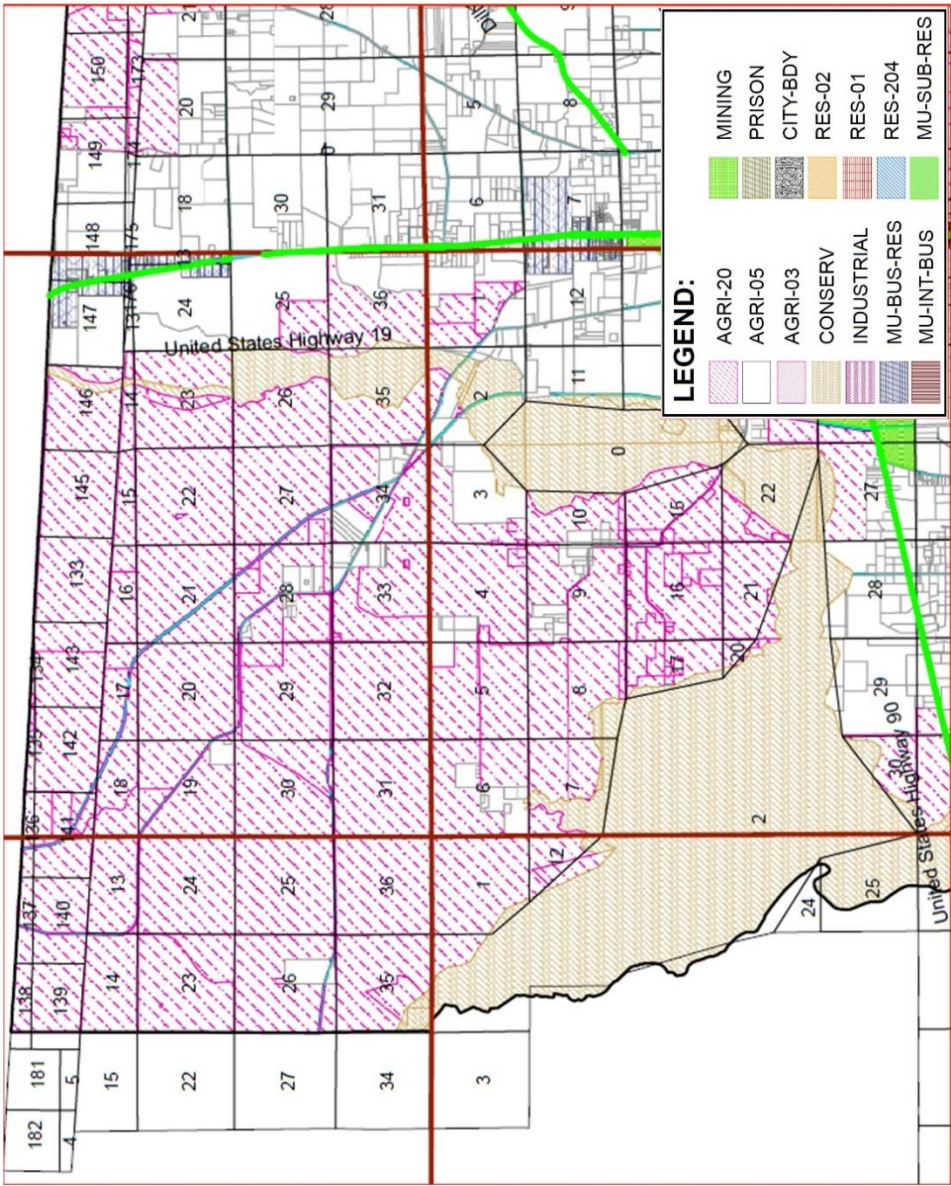


Figure 3: Jefferson County Future Land Use Map. Showing the area of the Norlas parcel, designated as Agricultural 20

Figure 27 Department of Economic Opportunity -Complete submittal

Appendix G:
Letters of support



Leon County
Board of County Commissioners

301 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, Florida 32301
(850) 606-5302 www.leoncountyfl.gov

Commissioners

NICK MADDOX
At-Large
Chairman

JIMBO JACKSON
District 2
Vice Chairman

BILL PROCTOR
District 1

JOHN E. DAILEY
District 3

BRYAN DESLOGE
District 4

KRISTIN DOZIER
District 5

MARY ANN LINDLEY
At-Large

VINCENT S. LONG
County Administrator

HERBERT W.A. THIELE
County Attorney

February 27, 2019

Mr. Hank Vinson, Staff Director
Acquisition and Restoration Council
3900 Commonwealth Blvd., MS 100
Tallahassee, FL 32399
Via email: hank.vinson@dep.state.fl.us

RE: Support for the Gem Land Florida Forever Project Proposal

Dear Mr. Vinson:

I am a Leon County Commissioner serving District 4 in northeastern Leon County Florida. I am a board member and past President of the National Association of Counties (NACo); a board member and past President of the Florida Association of Counties (FAC) and a member of the White House' Innovative Communities committee; I want to express my support for the Gem Land Company (GLC) Florida Forever project proposal, which will be reviewed and voted on by the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) on April 19, 2019 for the inclusion onto the Florida Forever list.

This project will permanently conserve 11,044 acres in my district and protect over 5.5 miles of shoreline along Lakes Iamonia and Miccosukee. These popular lakes provide tremendous public use opportunities and are critical for groundwater recharge, which is beneficial for the entire county. Leon County has been very proactive in water resource protection and conservation easements in the rural portions of my district and this project supports these efforts.

In addition, Leon County is supportive of conservation easements outside of the urban service area. A conservation easement on GLC is compatible with current county zoning and consistent with the directive in our comprehensive plan to protect natural areas, rural working lands, and public recreational opportunities.

Please share these comments with the Acquisition and Restoration Council and include this support letter as part of the official public record for the Gem Land Florida Forever project. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you questions or concerns. Hope all's well with you.

Sincerely,

Bryan M. Desloge
County Commissioner, District 4
DeslogeB@leoncountyfl.gov
850.606.5364

BD/bet

"People Focused. Performance Driven."

March 7, 2019

Mr. Hank Vinson, Staff Director
Acquisition and Restoration Council
3900 Commonwealth Blvd., MS 100
Tallahassee, FL 32399
Via email: hank.vinson@dep.state.fl.us

RE: Support for the Gem Land Florida Forever Project Proposal

Dear Mr. Vinson:

This is a letter of support for the Gem Land Company (GLC) Florida Forever project proposal which will be reviewed and voted on by the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) on April 19, 2019 for inclusion onto the Florida Forever list.

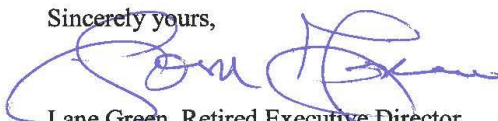
After serving eight years on ARC, with stints as Vice Chair and Chair, I can say unequivocally that this land conservation project is truly a “gem” for ARC and Floridians. Efforts by many of us have been underway for years to fill in the gaps of unprotected shorelines of Lake Iamonia (Leon County’s largest and most naturally functioning lake at 5,757 acres) and Lake Miccosukee (a close second).

This project will aid in protecting habitats for numerous rare, threatened, and endangered species as well as game species important to the hunting public in the Red Hills community. I grew up hunting and fishing these lakes, and I have relished the bounty of them over a lifetime, as have many generations of Greens and the general public.

More than 140,000 acres broadly surrounding these lakes are already under perpetual conservation easement protection. We desperately need to plug these gaps with easements *now* before it’s too late. This funding source could be our best, last, and only chance to accomplish this on these GLC properties. It would be a shame to miss this golden opportunity!

Please share these comments with the Acquisition and Restoration Council and include this support letter as part of the official public record for the Gem Land Florida Forever project. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely yours,



Lane Green, Retired Executive Director
Tall Timbers



Van Dyke Environmental Services
16624 Sunray Road
Tallahassee, FL 32309
850.893.4652

Mr. Hank Vinson, Staff Director
Acquisition and Restoration Council
3900 Commonwealth Blvd., MS 100
Tallahassee, FL 32399
Via email: hank.vinson@dep.state.fl.us

RE: Support for the Gem Land Florida Forever Project Proposal

Dear Mr. Vinson:

I would like to voice strong support for the inclusion the Gem Land Company's (GLC) project proposal onto the Florida Forever list. From 1982-2008, I was DEP's Regional Biologist for Northwest Florida. Part of my job was to monitor all of the significant waterbodies of the region. Lakes Miccosukee (6,312 acres) and Iamonia (5,757 acres) stood out in terms of the water resource quality, habitat diversity, and the deep affinity of anglers, waterfowlers, and nature enthusiasts of all stripes. In short, these public lakes and their watersheds exemplify the thriving wilderness that was once Old Florida.

Prescribed burning has been the management mainstay in the extensive forested uplands of GLC's properties. The results are obvious in terms of native biodiversity. My expertise, however, centers on wetland and aquatic habitats. I have carefully studied the riparian areas of these properties. There is nothing like them in this region in terms of intact natural shorelines and wetlands. They are truly primeval and team with diverse native plants and animals. The availability of these well-preserved properties for protection in perpetuity is a tremendous opportunity for Florida Forever.

In 1909, Lakes Miccosukee and Iamonia were dubbed the Disappearing Lakes by Geologist Eli Sellards because during droughts "they disappear in a manner seemingly inexplicable." That water level fluctuation results from their direct connection to groundwater via large active sinkholes. Lakes Miccosukee and Iamonia are "properties already under public ownership." Preservation of the watersheds of these public submerged lands is paramount to protecting not only the quality of these lakes but that of a vital resource for the people of Florida, the Floridan Aquifer. I hope the Acquisition and Restoration Council members see the wisdom of including GLC's proposal in the Florida Forever list.

Sincerely,

Jess Van Dyke

Figure 30 Letters of Support



Tallahassee Astronomical Society

PO Box 824
Tallahassee, FL 32302
March 6, 2019

Department of Environmental Protection
Office of Environmental Services
Division of State Lands
3900 Commonwealth Blvd MS 140
Tallahassee FL 32399

Attn: Paula Allen

RE: Florida Forever List Application for the GEM Land Company, Leon and Jefferson
Counties Florida

Dear Ms. Allen,

The Tallahassee Astronomical Society (TAS) supports the GEM Land Company conservation easement acquisition under the Florida Forever Program. Under arrangement with Leon County, TAS operates an Observatory and outreach center at the Cypress Landing boat ramp area, known as the Cypress Landing Astronomical Park, which is surrounded by the GEM Land Company Property, as shown on the attached map. The observatory includes two 14-inch reflector telescopes and an oyster-shell pad where the general public and TAS members can conduct astronomical observing programs using naked eye, binoculars, and telescopes.

Most importantly, however, the Cypress Landing Astronomical Park offers an increasingly scarce natural resource -- darkness. Dark skies are essential to the study and enjoyment of the night sky. Ever-increasing land development and overlighting of urban areas contributes to light pollution. "Dark sky" sites such as the Cypress Landing Astronomical Park exist primarily due to the lack of surrounding development.

The GEM Land Company application makes extensive listings of the benefits of preserving the natural character of the property but overlooks the benefit of preservation of the night sky. We, the Tallahassee Astronomical Society, offer the night sky as a crucial and irreplaceable benefit of the continued preservation of the GEM Land Company property. Please accept our support of their conservation easement proposal and favorably consider it for inclusion in the Florida Forever project list.

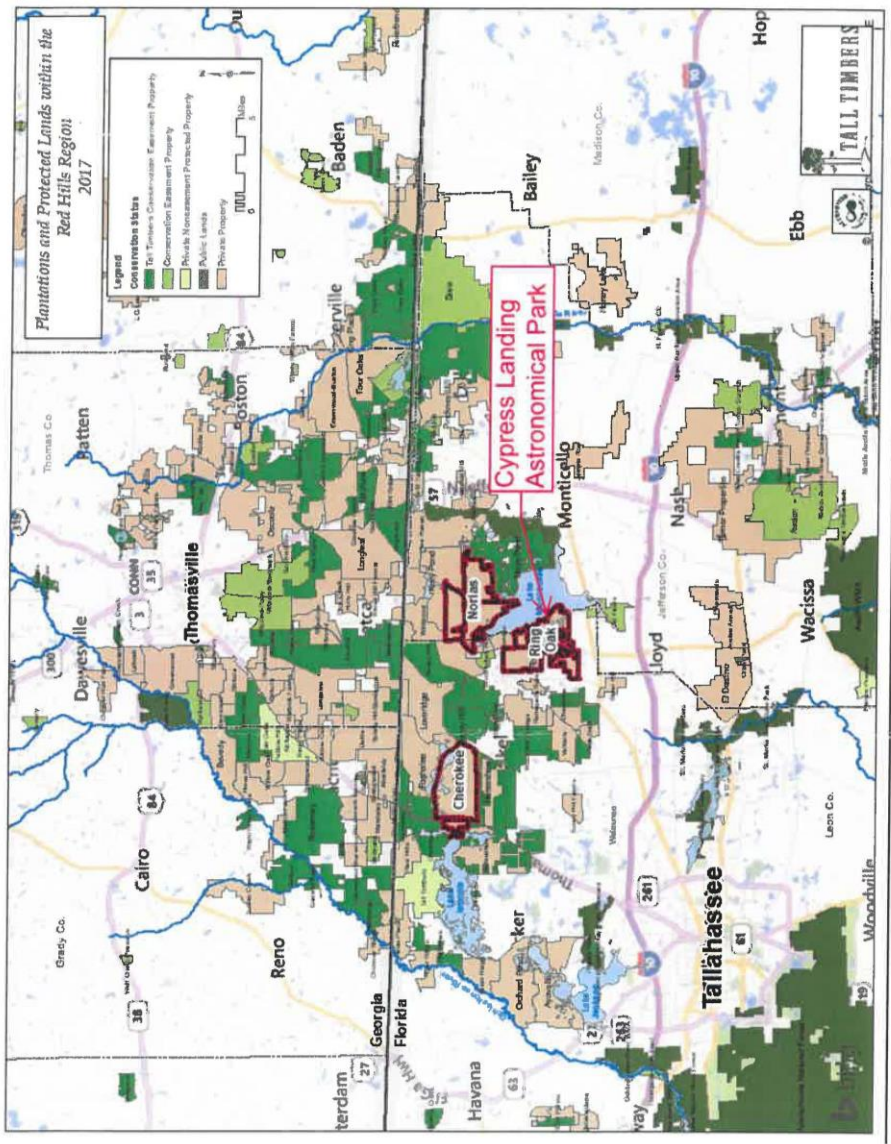
Please contact me if you have any questions about this information,

Sincerely,

Ken Kopczynski
President, Tallahassee Astronomical Society
Cypress Landing Astronomical Park

Figure 31 Letters of Support

Gem Land Company
2018 Florida Forever Application
Attachment A - Page 31



Map 1. A map of the Red Hills Region depicting Gem Land Co. properties along with conservation lands and other private lands of the region.

Figure 32 Letters of Support

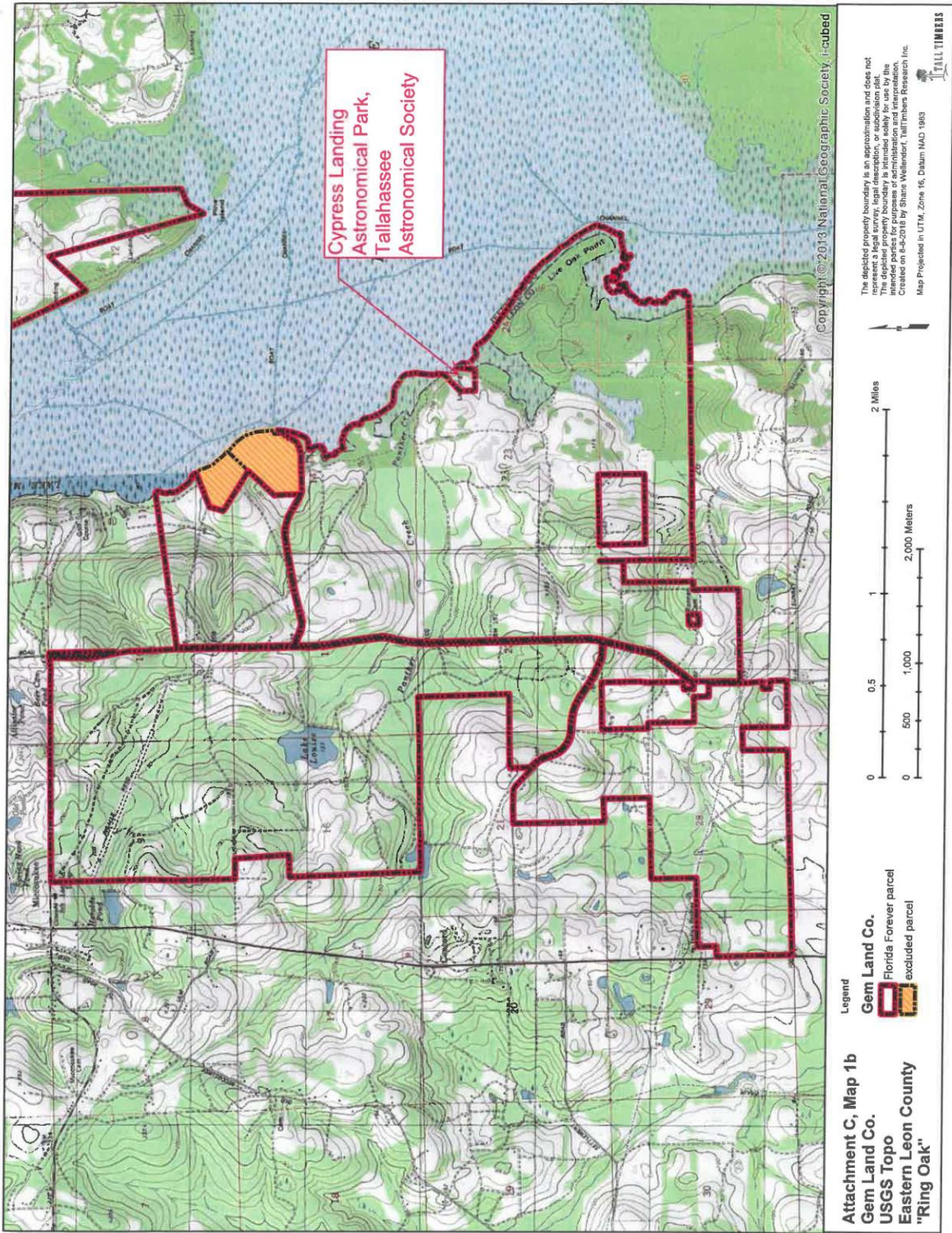


Figure 33 Letters of Support