

Rural Concerns Advisory Committee

July 16, 2024

4:00 pm

Extension Auditorium

22712 W Newberry Road, Newberry, FL 32669

Pages

1.	Call to Order	
2.	Approval of the Agenda	
3.	Welcome New Members	
4.	Old Business	
4.1	Update and discussion of Alachua County Agricultural Land Protection Strategy	1
5.	Approval of Minutes for 5-21-2024 meeting	24
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7.	Chair Comments	
8.	Committee Member Comments	
9.	Public Comment	
10.	Next Meeting	
11.	Adjournment	

Rural Concerns Advisory Committee Meeting
July 16, 2024
Information for Agenda Item 4.1 –
Update and discussion of Alachua County Agricultural Land Protection Strategy

The County Commission has requested input from Rural Concerns Advisory Committee (RCAC) on the development of its Agricultural Land Protection Strategy. For discussion and preparation for providing input to Land Conservation Program staff at the upcoming RCAC August 20th meeting, the following are staff summaries of the recent 6/4/2024 County Commission Special Meeting discussion on “Agricultural Land Protection Strategy – Development Update” ([link to meeting video is here](#)).

Background

The Alachua County Forever (ACF) Program mission is to acquire, improve, and manage environmentally significant lands that protect water resources, wildlife habitats and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation. The Alachua County Land Conservation and Management Program 10-year (2023-2032) plan also identified the need for protection of working agricultural lands as a component of the County’s land conservation goals and outlined the process for development of an Agricultural Land Protection Strategy.

In alignment with its mission, the ACF property evaluation process and scoring matrix were developed with an emphasis on protection of environmentally significant lands. To better address the needs for agricultural land protection and the distinct values and services it provides, a framework for evaluation and ranking of agricultural lands, together with funding strategies for acquisition of conservation easements on these lands, is under development.

Discussion Notes

- Recognize the Agricultural Land Protection Strategy is not a comprehensive strategy to protect the local agricultural industry but is one component of County support among others.
- What are the strategic priorities that make this different from the current ACF program?
 1. Sustainability of the local food economy, with emphasis on farm business plans, succession plans, long-term strategy plans.
 2. Protecting water recharge and wildlife.
 3. Protecting agricultural lands from development.
- Consider the County’s balance of grazing and field crops.
- Importance of flexibility for agricultural uses and adaptability to climate change.
 - Florida Statutes 704.06 Conservation easements; creation; acquisition; enforcement: requirements include allowing agricultural activities on conservation easements if such activity is a current or historic use of the land placed under easement.
- Payment for ecological services – opportunities for at least technical support with climate planning, water recharge, open space and tree protection.
- Cost-share easement funding partners – score and rank highly, but not require.
- Recognize challenges associated with keeping advisory board positions filled.
- Request from RCAC:
 - Provide County Commission any economic questions, additional feedback
 - Provide a member on new Agricultural Land Protection Strategy board



Alachua County Forever & Agricultural Land Protection Strategy

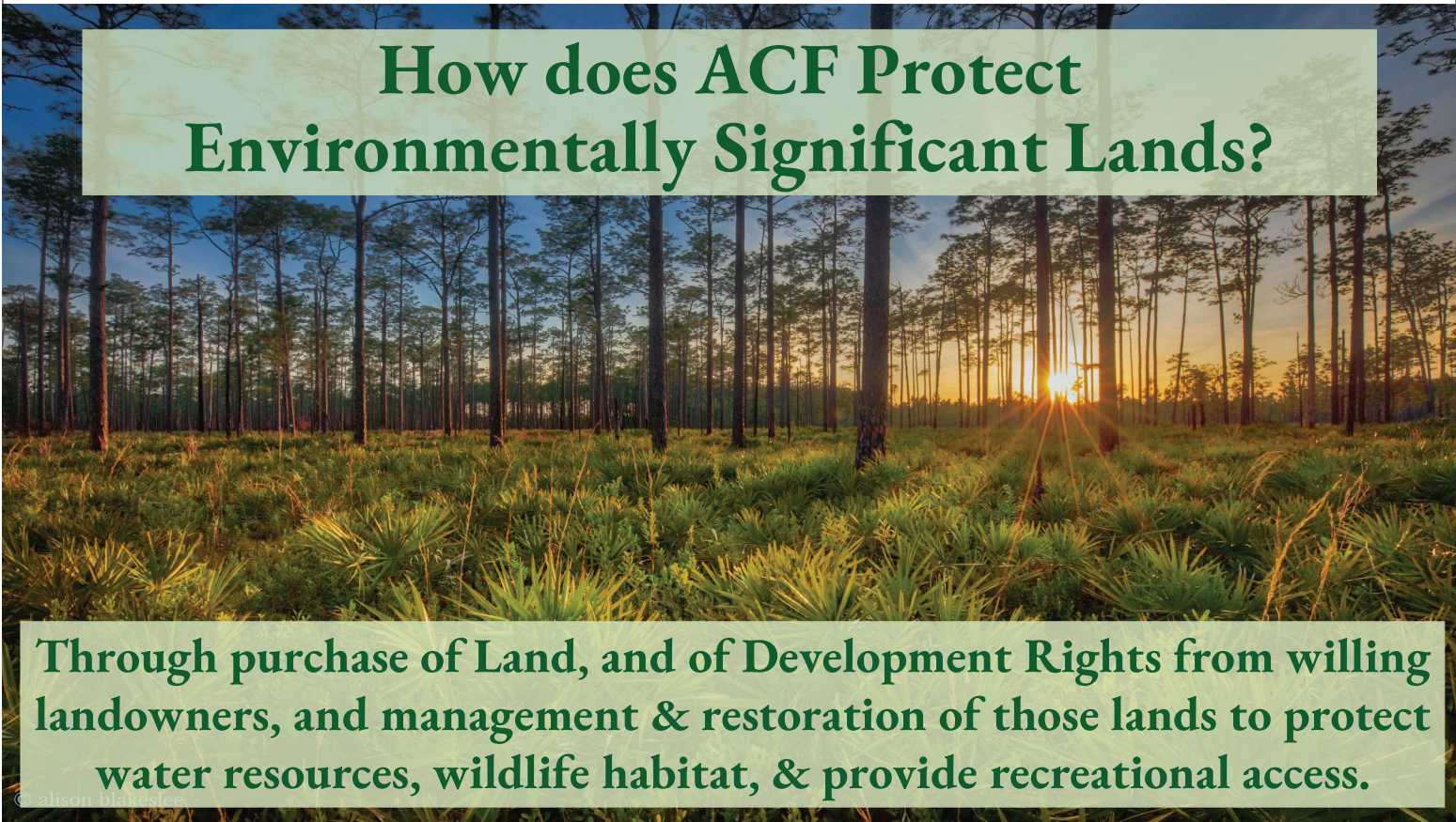
Strategy Development Update
BOCC Special Policy Meeting 06/04/24

Andi Christman, Land Conservation Program Manager

The Strategy Development

- Building on the Alachua County Forever Program and Process:
 - 1) **Develop a strategy framework and process to provide for better inclusion of agricultural lands in land conservation process.**
 - 2) Plan for likely implementation, likely as a sub-strategy under the Alachua County Forever Program.
- Present framework to the Board of County Commissioners, citizens, and stakeholders for input and review.
- Implement according to BOCC Direction.

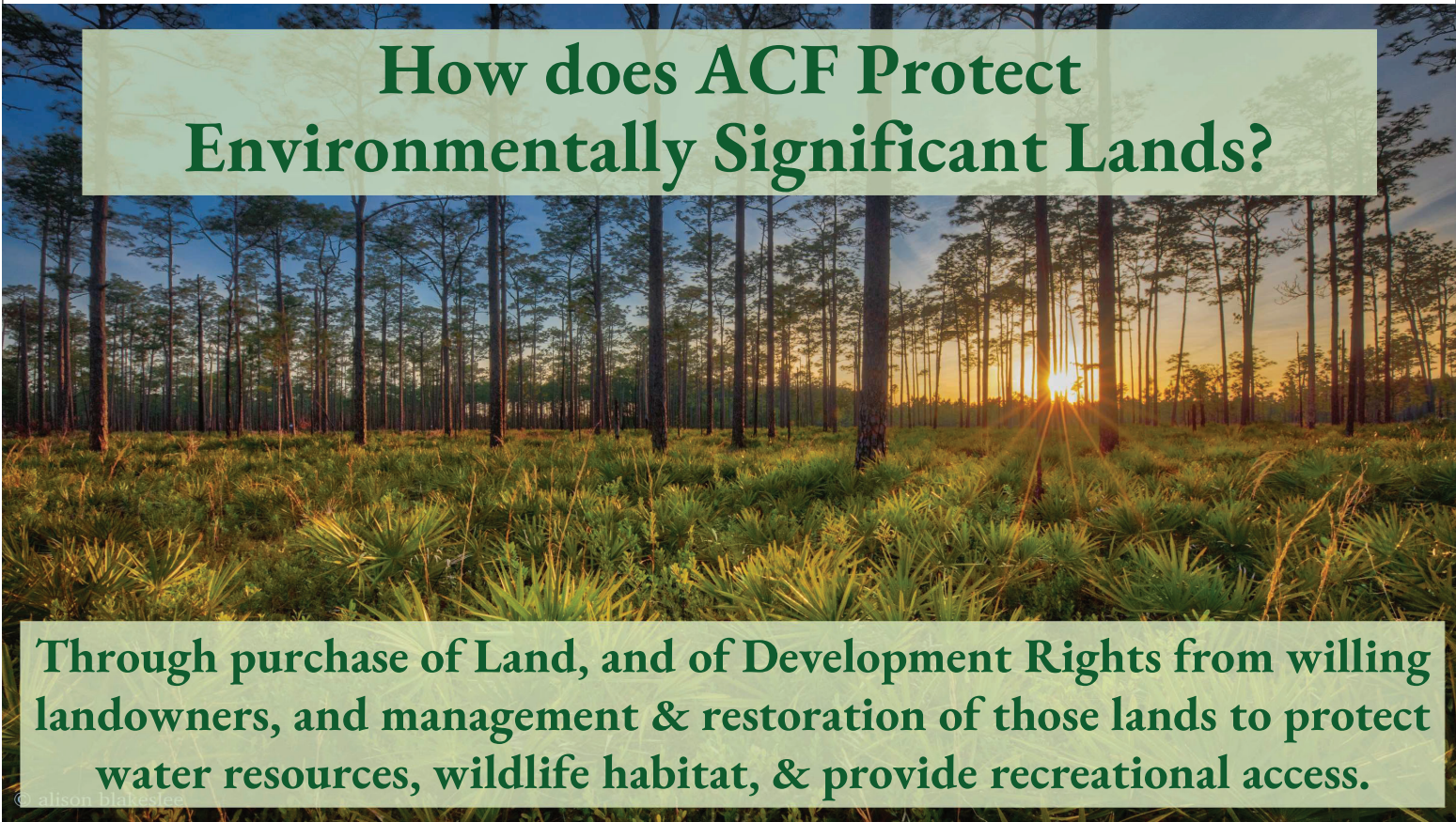




How does ACF Protect Environmentally Significant Lands?

Through purchase of Land, and of Development Rights from willing landowners, and management & restoration of those lands to protect water resources, wildlife habitat, & provide recreational access.

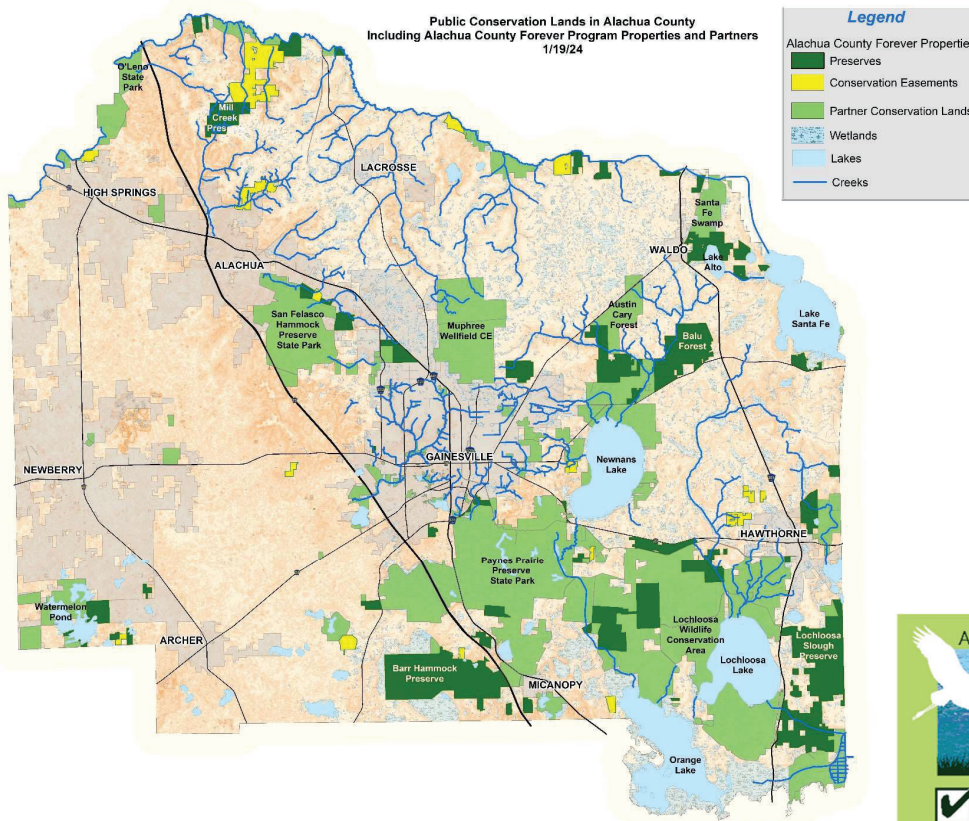
© alison blakeslee



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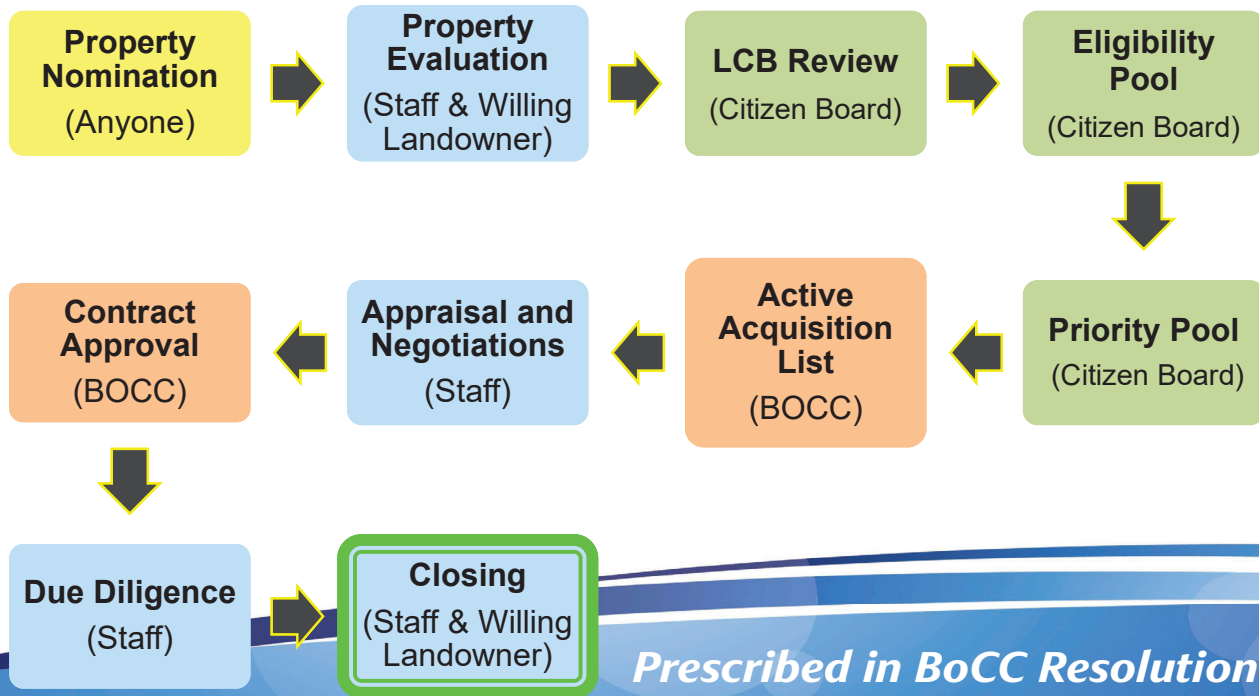
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**Alachua
County
Forever:**
*24 years &
34,000+ acres
protected*



What is the Land Acquisition Process?



Prescribed in BoCC Resolution 22-066

Santa Fe River Corridor

- Santa Fe River
- Hornsby Springshed

Florida Wildlife Corridor

- Lakes Santa Fe and Alto
- Austin Cary Flatwoods
- Lochloosa Creek & Slough

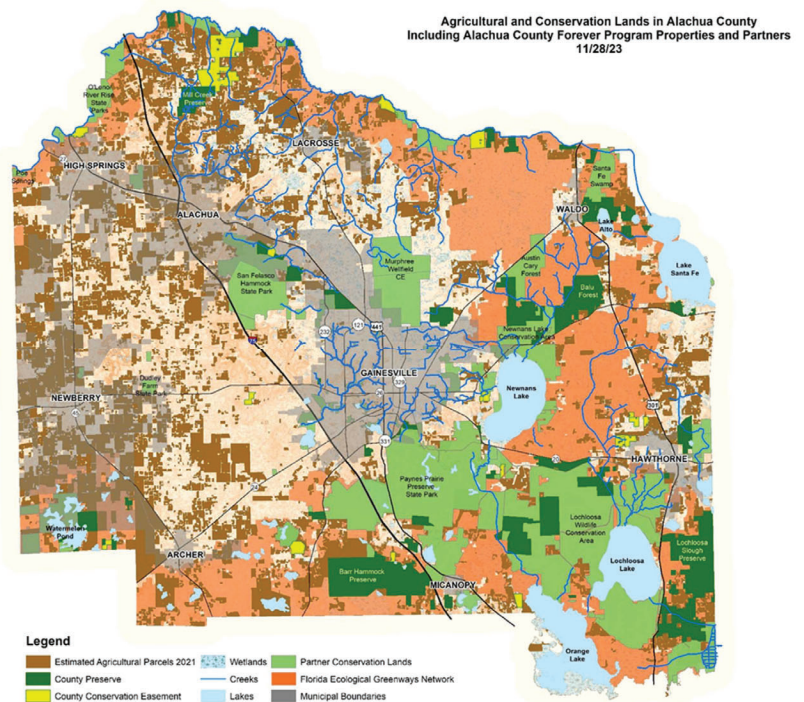
Southern Corridor

- Barr Hammock
- Watermelon Pond

Agricultural Land Protection

- Strengthening all Corridors
- Water Quality & Recharge
- Local Food Production

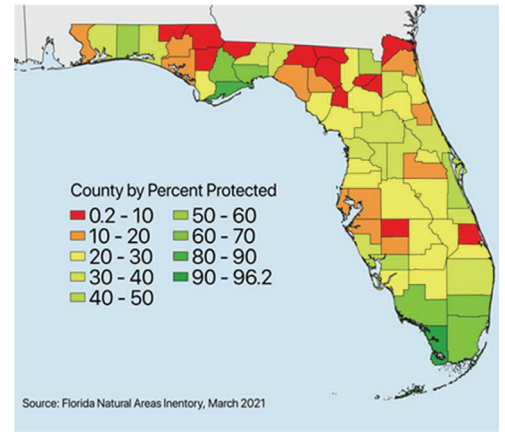
A Corridor-Based Strategy



Essential Levels of Protection

- **The 30 x 30 Target**

- Protecting 30% of land and water by 2030
- “*the minimum commitment to protect essential ecosystem services and buffer against the worst impacts of climate change”*”
- **43,000 more acres** need protection to conserve 30% of County.



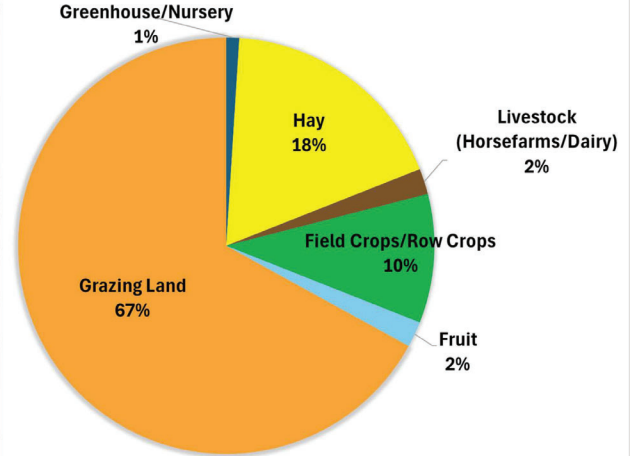
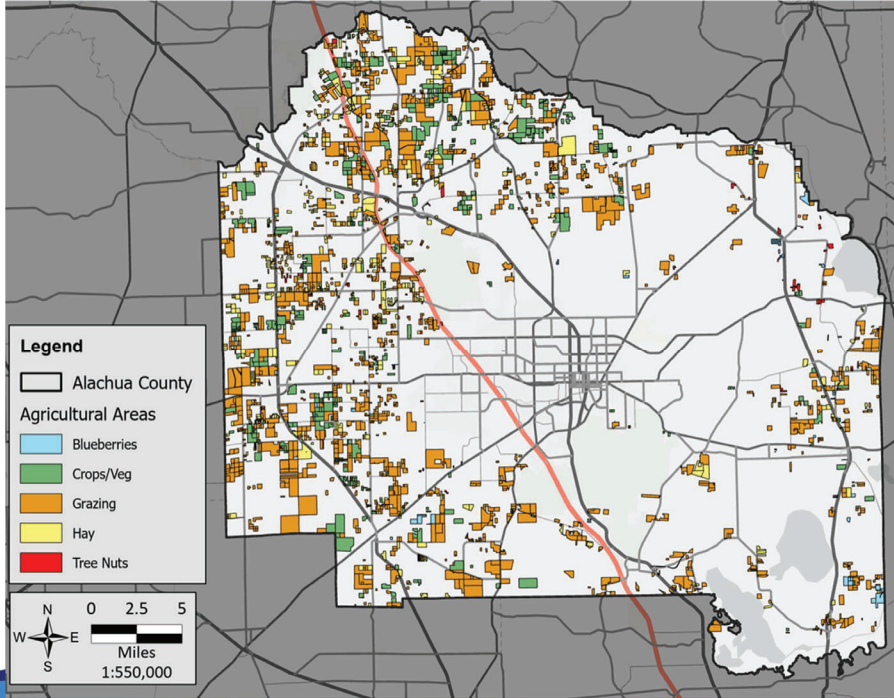
- **All efforts must include:**

- Corridors
- Wetlands and Water Resources
- Imperiled Species and Sites
- Diverse Habitats
- **Agricultural Land Protection**

How can ACF Protect Working Agricultural Lands?

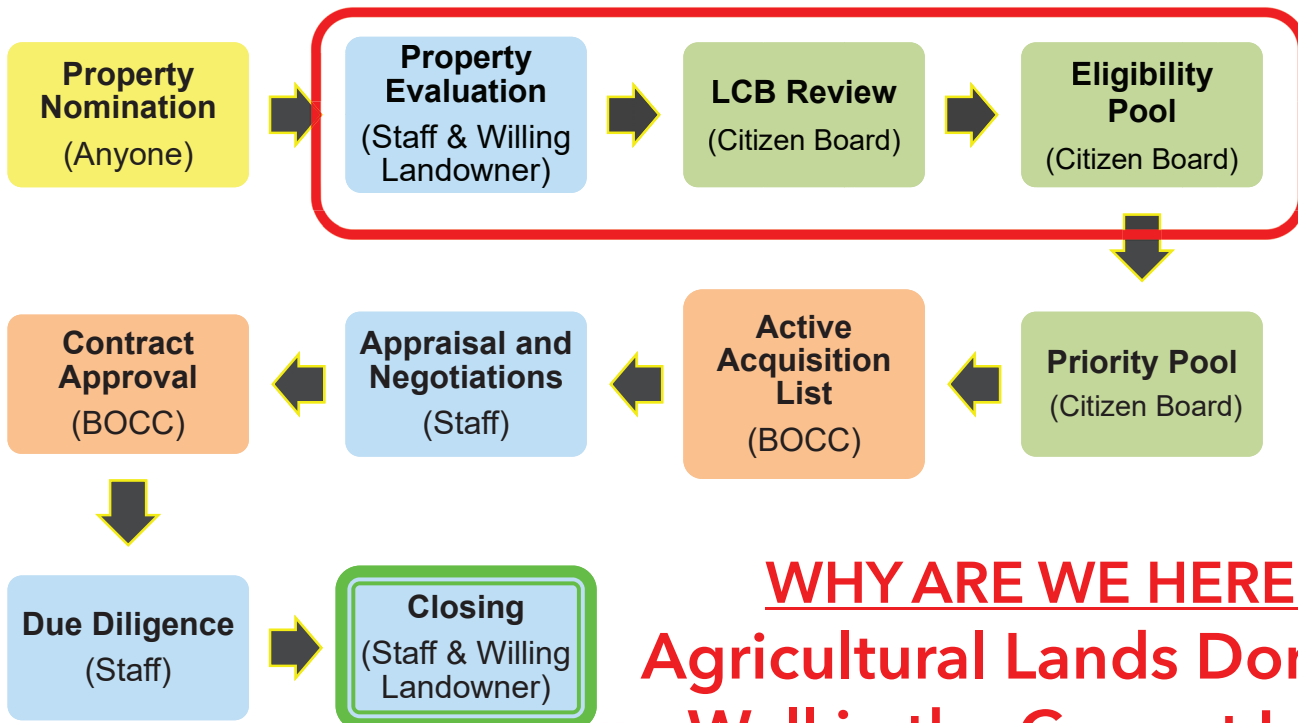
Through purchase of Development Rights from willing landowners and establishment of Conservation Easements focused on allowing continued agricultural practices.

Agricultural Properties in Alachua County



Since 1950:

- 50% Population Increase
- 50% Farmland Loss



WHY ARE WE HERE?
**Agricultural Lands Don't Fit
 Well in the Current Land
 Ranking & Review Process**

What's allowable Using WSPP Funds?

- The County Attorney's Office has determined that acquisition of conservation easements is an allowable use of Local Government Infrastructure Surtax funds, as conducted in accordance with FL Statute 704.06.



- The following requirements are established:
 - Easements are perpetual
 - Allows for continuation of current or historic agricultural uses.
 - Activities must be in accordance with BMPs

Agricultural Land Protection Strategy



PLANNED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- **Study: Year 1-2** (*Initiated September 2023 with Alachua Conservation Trust*)
 - Status –Development of strategy framework is underway
 - Mission statement, goals – **FIRST DRAFT UNDER REVIEW**
 - Ranking Matrix & Scoring criteria– **FIRST DRAFT UNDER REVIEW**
 - GIS-based Strategic Agricultural Lands Ranking model–**SECOND DRAFT UNDER REVIEW**
 - Draft Resolution and County Process– **FIRST DRAFT UNDER REVIEW**
 - Estimate scope of staff and equipment needs for implementation– **FIRST DRAFT UNDER REVIEW**
 - Framework for constitution of Advisory Board– **FIRST DRAFT UNDER REVIEW**
 - Framework for matching county resources with partner conservation programs
 - Develop Economic Impact Report for implementation
 - Stakeholder engagement and citizen outreach – **Stakeholder Charette 11/28/23, BoCC Special Policy Update 12/5/23, Advisory Board Outreach (RCAC, EPAC, LCB)**
- **Acquisition of Easements: Year 3-10**

DRAFT – Strategy Goal

Establish a sub-strategy with ACF that prioritizes protection of working agricultural lands

Do We Include:

- Target Acreage?
- Target Resources?
- Economic Impact?

2022 Census of Agriculture (USDA) *Alachua County Data*

Farms (number)	1712
Land in farms (acres)	197,906
Average farm size (acres)	116
Median farm size (acres)	21
Total crop land (acres)	72,230
Harvested cropland (acres)	46,075

DRAFT - Mission Statement

To better protect Alachua County's agricultural resources through permanent conservation of farmland.

*Agricultural resources are the primary means of production, including the **land, soil, water, and people**, which together comprise our agricultural community.*





DISCUSSION POINT

Strategy Mission and Goals

Draft - Property Ranking Matrix

✓ **11 Screening Questions** – To be answered through property site visit, and desktop review (55 points max).

- Agricultural Zoning?
- Primary Ag Operation Type?
- Greater than 50% Ag Land?
- Less than 2/3 Forested?
- Known Hazardous Sites on the Property?
- # of Structures other than residences (Ag supporting?)
- % of Farm offered for Easement?
- Size of Easement (acres?)
- Landowner Timeline for Easement?
- Farm Ownership Structure?
- Agree to Fair Market Appraisal?
- Funding Partner in Place?

Draft - Property Ranking Matrix

✓ 9 Environmental Ranking Question (45 points max.)

- Property enrolled in BMPs?
- Landowner using regenerative farming practices?
- Aquifer recharge value?
- Property in Santa Fe River, Watermelon Pond, or TMDL Watershed?
- In Springs Focus Area?
- % of property in Wetland or Floodplain?
- Proximity to Conservation Lands
- Willing to have Mgt Plan for Wildlife, Water, Soil, Nutrients?
- Potential Habitat for Wildlife?

Draft - Property Ranking Matrix

✓ 3 Economic Questions (15 points max)

- Farm sells products consumed in local area?
- Property is ranked for cost share funding from partner entity?
- Does landowner purchase farm materials locally?

Draft - Property Ranking Matrix

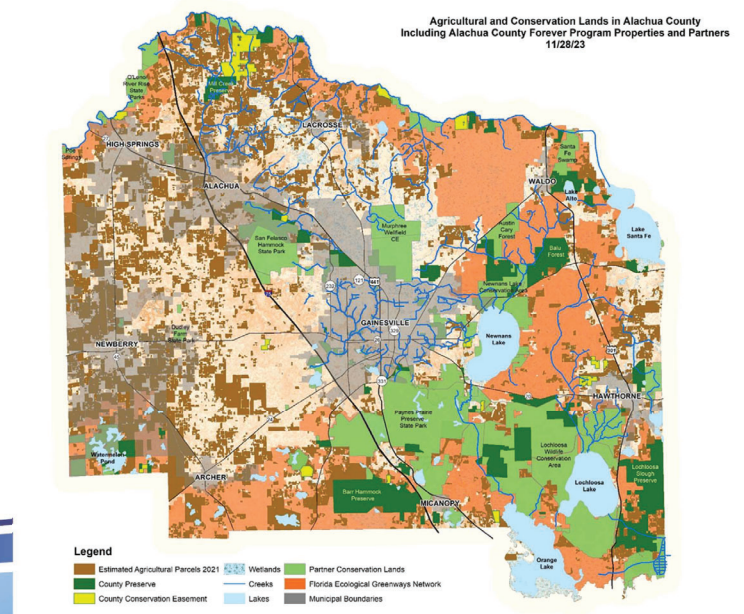
✓ 6 Social Questions (25 points max.)

- Landowner qualifies as “historically underserved” or “limited resource”?
- Landowner directly involved in mgt. and operation of property?
- Heir’s Property?
- Farm succession or transfer plan in place?
- Development Review (by EPD-NR staff).
- Immediate development threat adjacent to property?

Priorities Identified by other Programs

Criteria for Selected Farmland Protection Programs

Criteria	Programs
Productive capacity of soils	7
Proximity to public water or sewer	5
Development potential or probability of conversion	5
Produces specified or specialty crops	4
Percentage or minimum acreage in production	4
Presence of historic, scenic or environmental qualities	4
Location within specified zone	3
Relative size of the property	3
Exceeds minimum contiguous acreage	3
Proximity to existing or planned development	3
Enrollment in a conservation program	3
Amount or type of road frontage or access	3
Proximity to conserved lands	2
Capital investment in farm operation	2
Completion of a conservation and water quality plan	2
Adjacency of other agricultural lands	2
Current zoning	2
Identified for agriculture in comprehensive plan	2





DISCUSSION POINT

Matrix Scoring Criteria

21

Draft -Agricultural Land Suitability GIS Model

PURPOSE = to evaluate agricultural lands suitability for protection (via easement) using geospatial analysis.

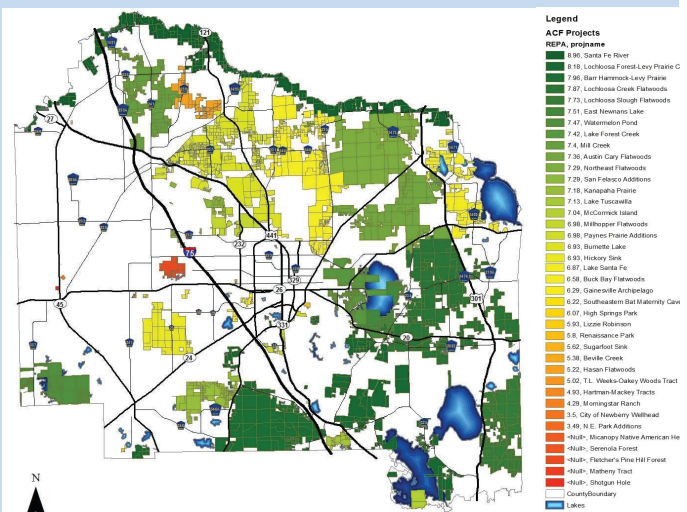
– Uses **8 datasets**, each scored from 1-5 for strategy suitability, and combined in model. Max Score = 40.

HIGH RANK/MOST SUITABLE LANDS:

- Geospatial model ranking = HIGH (5)
- Likelihood of cost-share \$\$ = HIGH

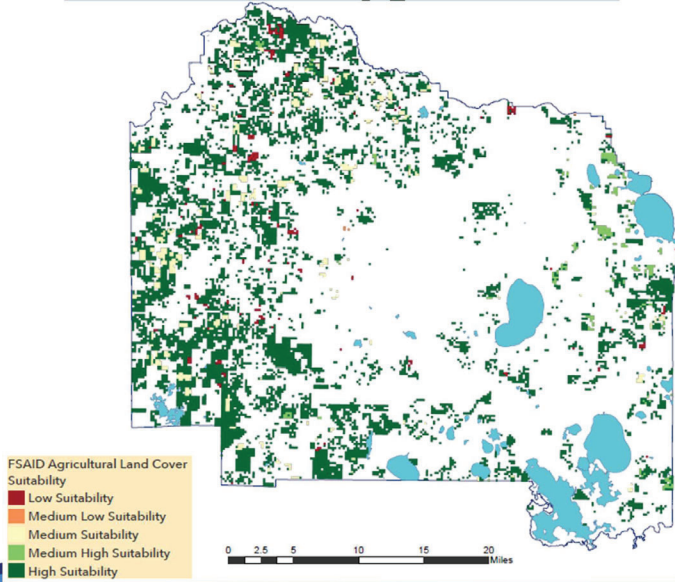
LOW RANK/LESS SUITABLE LANDS:

- Geospatial model ranking = LOW (1)
- Likelihood of cost-share \$\$ = LOW



Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#1 Agricultural Land Use Types



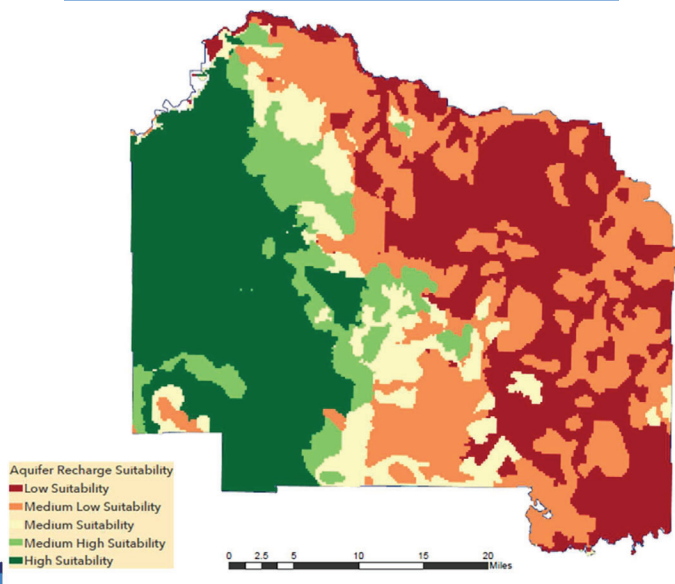
FDACS FSAID (FL Statewide Agricultural Irrigation Demand) data clipped to Alachua County. Utilizing this accurate agricultural land cover dataset in the suitability model ensures the model assesses agricultural land.

RANKS

- Livestock & Greenhouse = 1
- Aquaculture = 2
- Field Crops = 3
- Vegetables, Fruit (non citrus) = 4
- Grazing Land, Fallow, & Hay = 5

Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#2 Aquifer Recharge



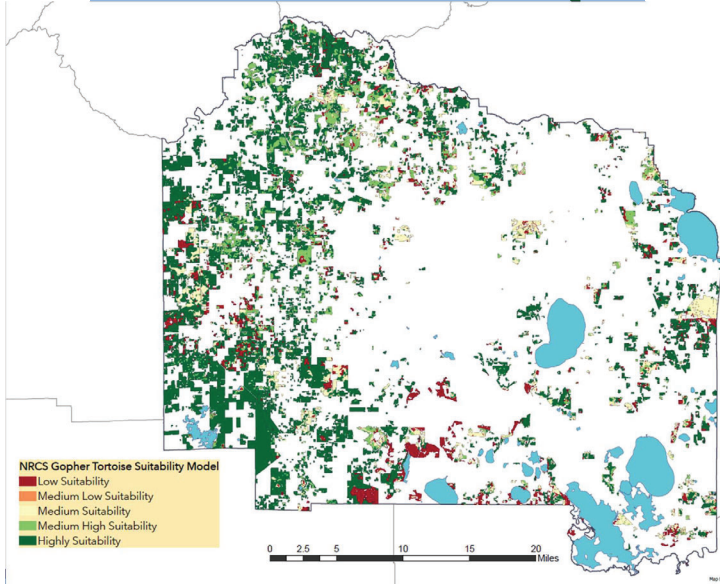
SRWMD Aquifer Recharge Data clipped to Alachua County. Protecting land in areas that promote aquifer recharge is critical to ensuring our water source is continually replenished.

RANKS

- Discharge = 1
- Recharge of 0-4 inches/year = 2
- Recharge of 4-8 inches/year = 3
- Recharge of 8-12 inches/year = 4
- Recharge of 12+ inches/year = 5

Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#3 Gopher Tortoise Habitat Suitability



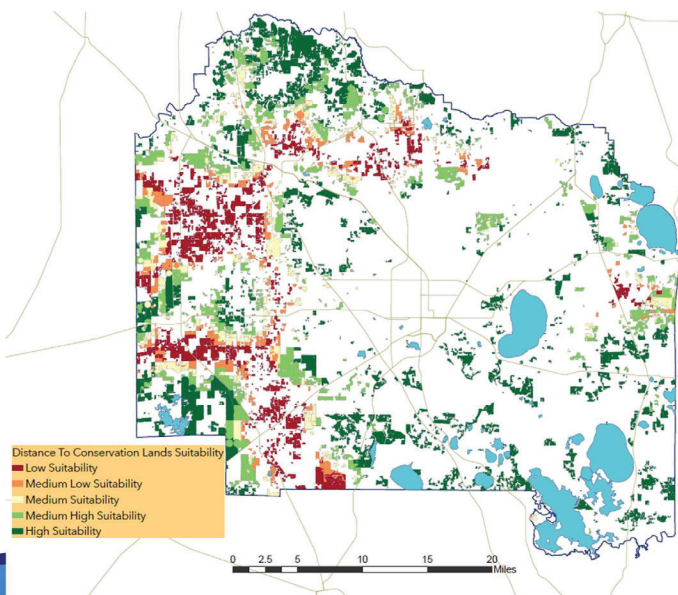
State threatened keystone species. Protection aligns with NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife goals. Model includes depth to water table, soil temperature, soil type, water deficits between rainfall and evapotranspiration, and “Major Land Resource Areas”.

RANKS

- Low Suitability for tortoises = 1
- Medium Suitability for tortoises = 3
- Med. High Suitability for tortoises = 4
- Highly Suited for tortoises = 5

Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#4 Proximity to Conservation Lands



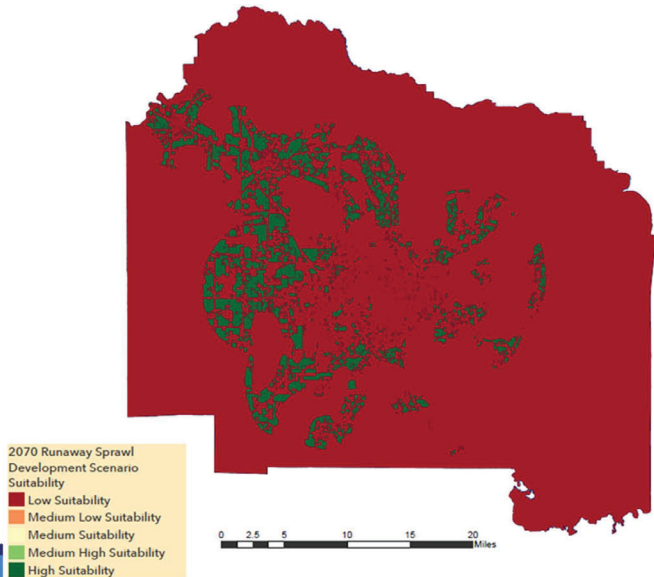
FSAID 2021 Agricultural Parcels proximity to FLMA Conservation Lands. Identify and give preference to agricultural lands adjacent or in close proximity to existing conservation lands.

RANKS

- Greater than 2 miles distance = 1
- 1.5 mile to 2 mile distance = 2
- 1 mile to 1.5 mile distance = 3
- 0.5 to 1 mile distance = 4
- 0 to 0.5 mile distance = 5

Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#5 Threat of Development



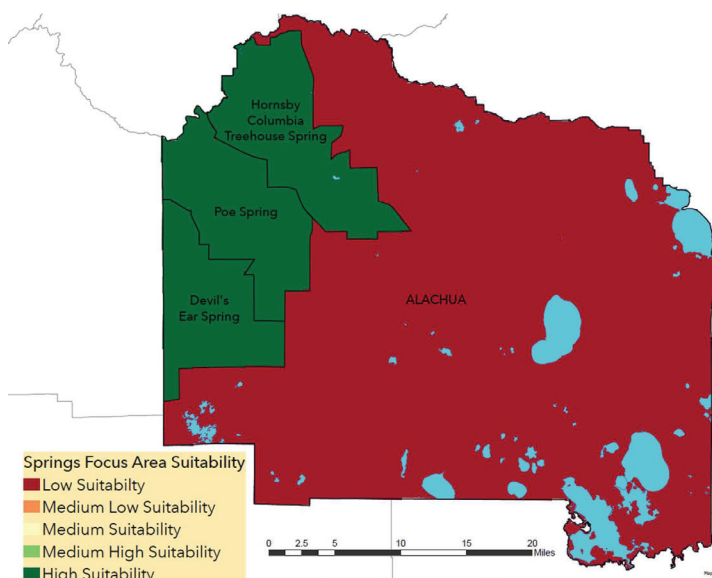
Florida 2070 Data. Conservation 2070 Sprawl Model. Sprawl 2070 captures a potential pattern of land use and associated population distribution for 2070, should all new development occur at the same development density as was present in each county in 2010.

RANKS

- Lands outside the predicted sprawl area = 1
- Lands inside the predicted sprawl area = 5

Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#6 Springs Priority Focus Area Protection



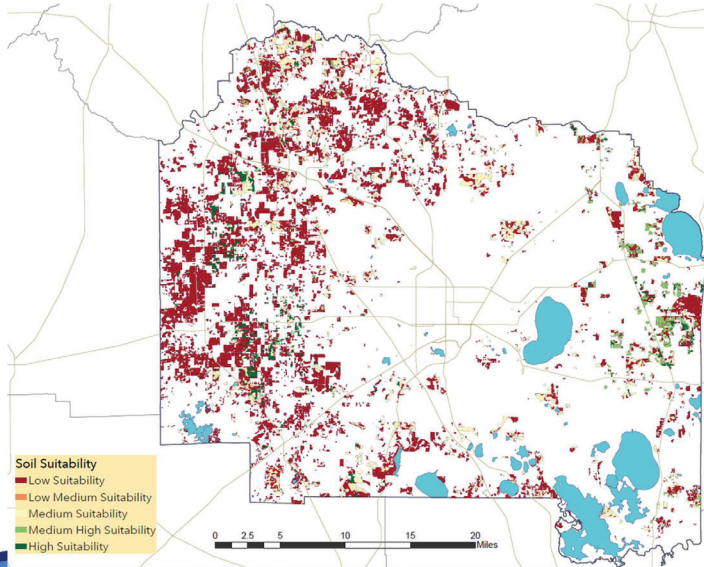
Land within the FLDEP and Alachua County designated Springs Priority Focus Areas (SPFA) can qualify for competitive DEP “Springs Restoration Funding” as cost share for easement acquisition. There are 3 SPFA’s in Alachua County, the “Columbia Hornsby Treehouse,” “Poe” and “Devil’s Ear”.

RANKS

- Lands outside a springs priority focus area = 1
- Lands inside a springs priority focus area = 5

Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#7 Soil Crop Productivity



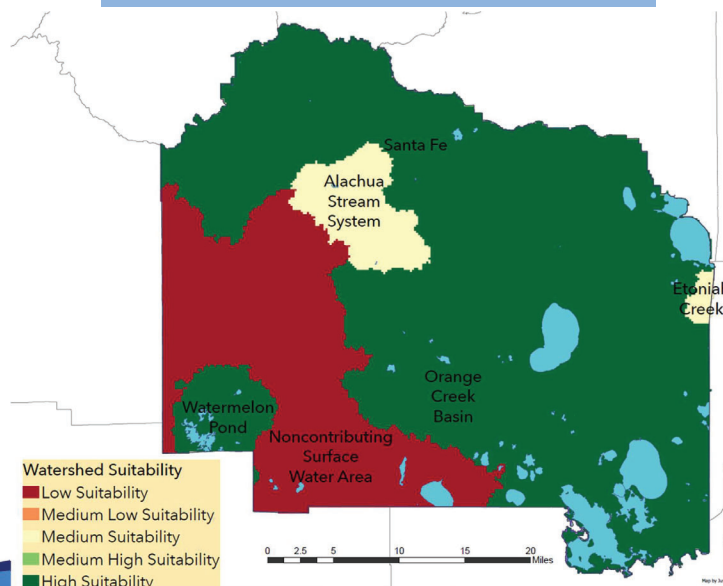
SSURGO (Soil Survey Geographic Database). Crop productivity for a given soil type assigns a value for that soils ability to grow food. Prioritizes protecting agricultural land for the future of food production.

RANKS

- Least productive soils = 1
- Low/Medium productivity = 2
- Moderate productivity = 3
- Medium High productivity = 4
- Most productive soils = 5

Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#8 Watershed Protection



USGS HUC 12 Watershed data.

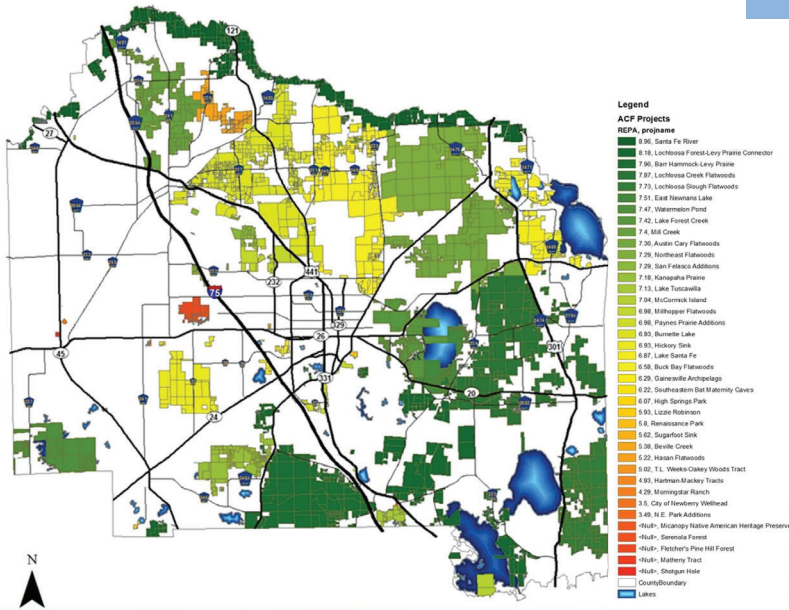
Surface water is a key consideration for floodplain protection and land conservation in important watersheds.

RANKS

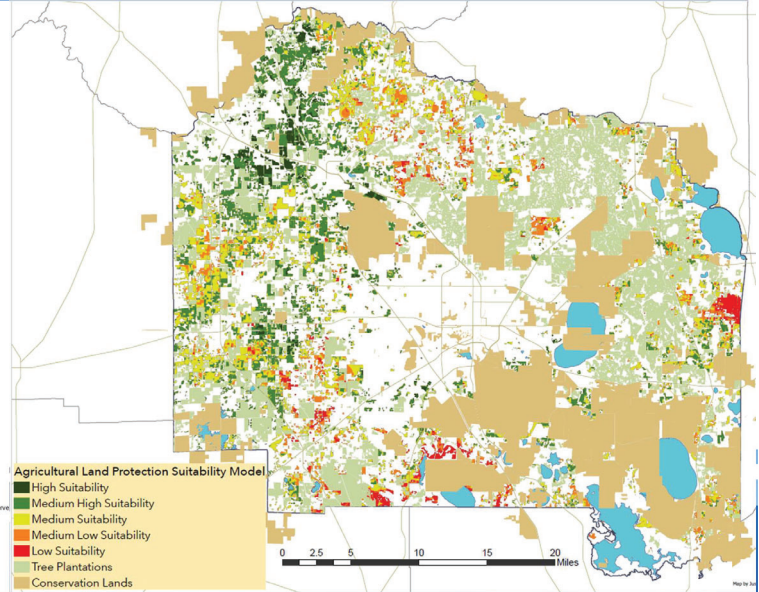
- Non-contributing Surface Water Area = 1
- Alachua Stream System & Etoniah Creek = 3
- Orange Creek Basin, Watermelon Pond, & Santa Fe River Watershed= 5

Identifying County-level geographic priorities

Original ACF Project Areas



Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model (Inputs 1-8)

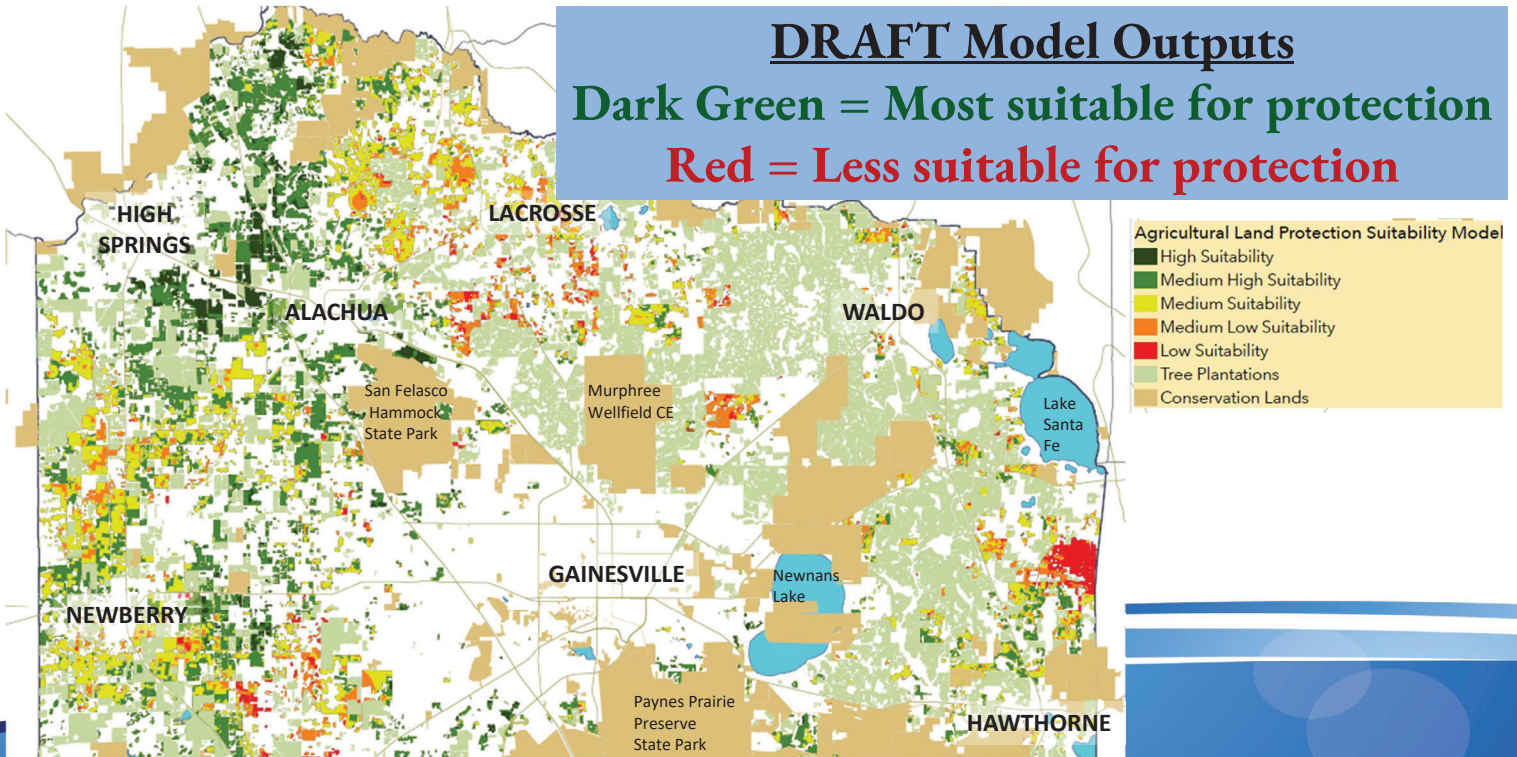


Identifying County-level geographic priorities

DRAFT Model Outputs

Dark Green = Most suitable for protection

Red = Less suitable for protection





DISCUSSION POINT

Geographic Model Data Inputs, Model Output and Use

33

Citizen Voice - Advisory Board or Subcommittee

TASK - Identify and recommend potential members and committee structure, and building a joint subcommittee from stakeholders:

1. LCB members
2. Rural Concerns Advisory Committee
3. Agricultural producers
4. Local Food Organization
5. IFAS Representatives
6. Diverse stakeholders representing county wide municipalities
7. Others?



DISCUSSION POINT

Advisory Board Constitution and Role

35

Stakeholder Outreach

- * Landowner Charette: 11/28/23
- * Ongoing 1-on-1 Landowner Outreach



PRESENTATIONS

- Land Conservation Board : 4/25/24
- Environmental Protection Advisory Committee: 5/7/24
- Rural Concerns Committee: 5/21/24
- Board of County Commissioners Special Policy meetings: 12/5/23 & 6/4/24
- Rural Concerns Committee: 8/20/24

Stakeholder Feedback

- **Flexibility in Agricultural Land Uses**
- **Farm Transfer and Succession Planning** – Current Grant from American Farmland Trust
- **Payment for Ecosystem Services provided by their farms** – Future Target? - Partnering landowners with other funding sources?
- **Prioritization based on Soils and Economic impact of farm**

37



DISCUSSION POINT

Outreach Strategy

38

Easement Funding Partners

Name	What does it fund	Application /Enrollment Period
ACEP ALE	50% CE Value	Typically end of calendar or beginning of calendar year either December or January
RCPP	50% or 25% of CE Value	Periodic open enrollment periods depending on available funding and defined by lead partner
Springs Restoration funding & Alternate Water Supply	Acquisition costs typically 10% – 50% of CE value	Typically accept applications in December or each year. Funding awards are typically not announced until Fall or Winter the following year.
Florida Forever	Acquisition & due diligence	Varies depending on property status within or outside of a Florida Forever project area
Rural Family Lands Protection Program	25%-100% of CE Value & Due Diligence	Open enrollment periods. The last open enrollment was June 2023.

Partnerships identified for early implementation

Rural And Family Lands Protection Program

Hasan Flatwoods – Davis

Hasan Flatwoods - Holt Woitas

SJRWMD Critical Wetlands and Other

Lochloosa Forest Connector – Richardson Brothers

DEP/SRWMD Springs Protection Funding

High Springs - Shires

Opportunities for Feedback

- Feedback on General Strategy Concept
- Feedback on Specifics of Strategy Development As Presented
 - Mission
 - Ranking Questions
 - Funding & Project Cost-Sharing
 - Crop Priorities
 - Geographic Priorities
 - Advisory Board Structure
 - Outreach
 - Other?

Types of Staff Recommendations to be presented to BOCC in August

- Mission & Ranking Adoption
- Minimum Easement Deed Requirements/Language
- Agricultural Land Strategy Easement Funding
 - Prioritization of a % of Land Acquisition Funding for Agricultural Easements
 - Requirements for Project Cost-Sharing from partners
- Advisory Board Structure
- Staffing/Equipment Needs



**QUESTIONS
OR
COMMENTS?**

DRAFT
Rural Concerns Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes

May 21, 2024

4:00 pm

Community Support Services, Conference Room A

218 SE 24th St., Gainesville, FL 32641

1. Call to Order

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Dr. Rodney Clouser (Chair), Jordan Callaham (Vice Chair), Janet Hearn, Micky McMillan, George Mells, John Nix, Missy Norman, Dr. Cindy Sanders

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Amy Van Scoik

STAFF PRESENT:

Ken McMurry, Senior Planner, Growth Management

Regina Williams, Planning Assistant, Growth Management

Ben Chumley, Principal Planner, Growth Management

Andi Christman, Land Conservation Program Manager, Environmental Protection

PUBLIC PRESENT:

Annie Moscato

Chair Clouser called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm. There were 7 members physically present, which was confirmed to satisfy the requirement for at least a quorum physically present under County Advisory Board Guidelines. Chair Clouser welcomed the member of the public.

Mr. Nix joined the meeting at 4:04 pm.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Chair Clouser asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Motion was made by Dr. Sanders to approve the agenda; seconded by Mr. Nix.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously

3. Welcome New Member

Chair Clouser welcomed new member Missy Norman. She introduced herself including a summary of her background and experience with silvicultural activities, followed by each member briefly introducing themselves.

4. Old Business

4.1 Update on Alachua County Agricultural Land Protection Strategy – Andi Christman, Environmental Program Manager, Alachua County Environmental Protection Department

Ms. Christman gave an overview of the existing Alachua County Forever program and its land conservation strategies. She said the Agricultural Land Protection Strategy is being modeled after the Alachua County Forever program but will provide a better opportunity for direct agricultural land protection; will use Wild Spaces Public Places sales tax funds; and does not address all needs for agricultural industry and land protection in the County but is focused on incorporating agricultural lands into the land conservation program.

She discussed the planned implementation timeline; draft mission statement, property ranking matrix, and land suitability GIS model; stakeholder outreach; citizen advisory board; easement funding partners; types of staff recommendations to be presented to the County Commission; and opportunities for input from RCAC and other individuals.

There were questions and discussion by Committee members regarding use of the sales tax funding, valuation of easements, flexibility in changing crops, role of silviculture, and the land ranking system. There were also questions and discussion by Committee members regarding other agricultural protection strategies addressing economic issues, role of the program in maintaining viability of agriculture, landowner motivations to participate, and other Florida counties with similar programs. Ms. Moscato said landowners often choose to preserve a family agricultural legacy despite the loss of financial compensation. Ms. Christman said anyone is welcome to send her additional comments.

5. Approval of minutes for 04-16-2024 meeting

Motion was made by Ms. Hearn to approve the minutes for the 04-16-2024 meeting; seconded by Ms. McMillan.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously

6. Attendance Report

Mr. McMurry said the current Attendance Report showed all members in compliance with the attendance policy at this time. He said the Attendance Report is always sent out with the meeting materials and that if members have any questions about their status, they should ask staff. He said there are 3 current vacancies, and a new application was received for the At Large vacancy.

7. Chair Comments

Chair Clouser asked Dr. Sanders for an update on the broadband local technology planning team. She said the local team for our 5-county area is meeting again monthly starting in May. She said several counties including Alachua County have received broadband funding since the team last met.

Chair Clouser asked if he could work with staff on the upcoming meeting agenda and there were no objections. He said that members could also email staff with any agenda suggestions.

8. Committee Members Comments

There were no Committee member comments.

9. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

10. Next Meeting

July 16th at the Extension Office.

11. Adjournment

Motion was made by Mr. Nix to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Dr. Sanders.

ACTION: Motion passed unanimously.

Chair Clouser called the meeting to a close at 5:52 pm.

05/22/2024

Attendance Report

Rural Concerns Advisory Committee

Staff Liaison: Ken McMurry

Member Position	Term Start	Term End	10-17-23	01-16-24	02-20-24	03-19-24	04-16-24	05-21-24	Meetings Attended
Callaham, Jordan Member from the Farm Bureau	10-01-2021	9-30-2024	P	P	A	P	P	P	5 of 6
Clouser, Rodney Member from UF-IFAS	10-01-2022	9-30-2025	P	P	P	P	P	P	6 of 6
Hearn, Janet Residing in Unincorporated Area Outside Urban Cluster...	10-01-2023	9-30-2026	A	P	P	P	P	P	5 of 6
McMillan, Micky Actively Involved in Agriculture and/or Silviculture	02-01-2024	9-30-2026	--	--	P	P	P	P	4 of 4
Mells, George Residing in Unincorporated Area Outside Urban Cluster...	10-01-2022	9-30-2025	P	P	P	P	P	P	6 of 6
Nix, John Actively Involved in Agriculture and/or Silviculture	10-01-2023	9-30-2026	P	P	P	P	P	P	6 of 6
Norman, Missy Actively Involved in Agriculture and/or Silviculture	05-14-2024	9-30-2026	--	--	--	--	--	P	1 of 1
Sanders, Cindy Member from County Extension Office	10-01-2023	9-30-2026	A	P	A	P	P	P	4 of 6
Van Scoik, Amy Actively Involved in Agriculture and/or Silviculture	06-01-2023	9-30-2025	P	P	A	P	P	A	4 of 6
VACANT Residing in Unincorporated Area Outside Urban Cluster...	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
VACANT Member Chosen At Large	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
VACANT Alternate Member Chosen At Large	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

P = Present

A = Absent

Attendance is defined as being physically present at the meeting for one hour or 50% of the length of the meeting, whichever is shorter. Any regular or alternate member whose attendance is less than 50% of the last 6 consecutive meetings shall automatically be removed from the advisory committee.