



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 23-00403

Agenda Date: 9/26/2023

Agenda Item Name:

Pithlachocco Preserve 10-year Management Plan

Presenter:

Andi Christman – Program Manager, Environmental Protection Department, Land Conservation and Management, 352-264-6803; Scott Crosby – Senior Environmental Specialist; Environmental Protection Department, Land Conservation and Management, 352-213-0024

Description:

Request for the Board of County Commissioners to approve the Pithlachocco Preserve 10-year Management Plan (Exhibit 1).

Recommended Action:

Approve the Pithlachocco Preserve 10-year Management Plan.

Prior Board Motions:

On February 26, 2002, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) adopted the guiding principles for the Alachua County Forever Program, including guidance on management plan development for county nature preserves.

On January 23, 2007, the BOCC approved and exercised the options to purchase the Lake Forest Creek – Wainberg tract and authorized staff to execute additional documents as necessary to close the transaction.

On January 22, 2013, the BOCC approved and exercised the option to purchase the Lake Forest Creek – Lewis tract and authorized staff to execute additional documents as necessary to close the transaction.

On January 22, 2013, the BOCC adopted the Alachua County Forever Hunting Business Plan which allows for a publicly advertised Request for Proposal (RFP) process; through which individuals may submit proposals for ranking and consideration, to enter into contractual agreements to exchange maintenance and caretaker services on a county preserve for limited hunting opportunities on the preserve.

On April 8, 2014, the BOCC approved and exercised the option to purchase the Lake Forest Creek – Floyd tract and authorized staff to execute additional documents as necessary to close the transaction.

On January 28, 2020, the BOCC executed the agreement between Alachua County and Charles

Lesch for hunting and caretaking services in the Newnan's Lake Cypress Preserve (now Pithlachocco Preserve) RFP 19-922. The agreement has a five-year term.

Fiscal Note:

An estimated \$850 in annual maintenance costs from general fund, fund 001.41.4160.537.xxx (staffing), and the Wild Spaces and Public Places surtax funds (2017-2022 cycle), fund 021.41.4160.537.xxx (Materials and supplies).

Breakdown of annual maintenance costs:

Establishment of photopoints in significant areas:	\$250
Removal of legacy solid waste:	\$400
Treat and monitor known invasive plant populations:	\$200

Maintenance and monitoring of the preserve is conducted by staff as a part of regular duties. Additional maintenance, monitoring, security, and caretaker services are provided through the preserve hunting and caretaking agreement.

Strategic Guide:

Environment

Background:

Alachua County's Pithlachocco Preserve is a 27.14-acre nature preserve located adjacent to the sovereign submerged lands of Newnans Lake, near Power's Park. The preserve was acquired in three acquisitions, utilizing Alachua County Forever (ACF) bond funds, funds from the 2008 Wild Spaces and Public Places surtax, and a federal grant award. Due to the small size of the preserve and the sensitive habitats onsite, the preserve is open to the public by appointment only. The 10-Year Management Plan presented here provides the strategies and priorities for management of the natural and cultural resources of the preserve.

Pithlachocco Preserve is located at 5600 SE Hawthorne Road, Gainesville, in the southeast portion of Alachua County along Newnans Lake. The majority of the land's road frontage is along State Road 20 (Hawthorne Road), and the northern and southern boundary lines abut private lands. The eastern boundary abuts sovereign submerged lands owned by the State of Florida. Outstanding biotic features of the Preserve include three distinct natural communities, bottomland forest, floodplain swamp, upland hardwood forest, and a disturbed blackwater stream. Most of these are in excellent condition. The most important features of the Preserve are: the connection to the cypress dominated swamp surrounding Newnans Lake; its contribution and proximity to important wading bird habitat; the connection to surrounding conservation lands; and the area's abundance of significant Native American cultural history and artifacts. Management of the Preserve will be guided by the Alachua County Forever program mission.

The Alachua County Forever mission statement is: To acquire, improve and manage environmentally significant lands to protect water resources, wildlife habitats and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation. For the County's nature preserves, "to improve and manage" means to conduct land stewardship practices; to restore and enhance the natural resources to preserve their ecological function for future generations. It also means to provide and maintain functional and safe infrastructure for public access, where suitable. The County manages preserves under the Commission-adopted principal of "No Net Loss of Conservation Value" established as Commission policy in 2002 as part of the guiding principles for the Alachua County Forever Program.

The Alachua County Environmental Protection Department, Land Conservation Program staff are responsible for the development of these management plans for ACF preserves. The management planning process was originally developed by the Land Conservation Stewardship Team (LCST) in 2003 and is based upon generally used best practices (Exhibit 2). It was updated in 2014 to comply with the Board of County Commissioners resolution which guides the ACF program (Resolution 22-066 as amended) to incorporate the Land Conservation Board (LCB) into the review process. All plans are also made available for public input and review as a part of the plan development process.

The Pithlachocco Preserve Management Plan was presented to the Alachua County Land Conservation Board (LCB) for review on March 23, 2023, and the LCB moved to support the plan on April 27, 2023. The Management Plan was also presented at a public workshop held on May 18, 2023, and comments received from the public were incorporated into the final draft.

The plan has been presented for consideration by the BOCC on the consent agenda due to the small size of the preserve and routine nature of the preserve management practices (Exhibit 3).