



Agenda Item Summary

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**File #: 23-00454**

**Agenda Date: 8/22/2023**

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**Agenda Item Name:**

**Addition of Land Conservation Projects to the Alachua County Forever Active Acquisition List**

**Presenter:**

Emily Uhlmann, Senior Planner – Environmental Protection Department, (352) 275-2050

**Description:**

Staff requests the Board of County Commissioners (Board) approve the addition of the following land conservation projects to the Alachua County Forever Active Acquisition List. The staff recommendation is based on the addition of these properties to the Priority Pool by the Land Conservation Board as outlined in Resolution 22-066.

1. Buck Bay Flatwoods – J.W.C. Farms Inc. (Full Price List)
2. Buck Bay Flatwoods – Burnsed (Full Price List)

Addition of these projects to the Active Acquisition List, authorizes staff to: obtain title work and appraisals, negotiate price and terms with the owners, and execute purchase or option contracts. Any purchase contract or option will be brought back to the Board for consideration.

**Recommended Action:**

Approve the addition of the following properties on the Active Acquisition List.

1. Buck Bay Flatwoods – J.W.C. Farms Inc. (Full Price List)
2. Buck Bay Flatwoods – Burnsed (Full Price List)

**Prior Board Motions:**

None

**Fiscal Note:**

**Buck Bay Flatwoods – J.W.C. Farms Inc. (Conservation Easement) - Cost Estimates:**

- Alachua County Property Appraiser (ACPA) Value: \$3,277,576\*
- Acquisition Due Diligence: \$359,000
  - Due Diligence: title work, appraisal, survey, environmental assessment
- Stewardship, initial 10 years: \$5,500 (Conservation Easement)

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10-year Stewardship: \$3,642,076

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$24,640.07

**Buck Bay Flatwoods – Burned (Fee Simple) – Cost Estimates:**

- Alachua County Property Appraiser (ACPA) Value: \$592,400\*
- Acquisition Due Diligence: \$68,300
  - Due Diligence: title work, appraisals, survey, environmental assessment,
- Stewardship, initial 10 years: \$180,835

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10 year stewardship: \$841,535

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$1,631.08

Estimated acquisition costs for both properties total: \$4,297,276

Estimated stewardship costs for the initial 10 years for both properties total: \$186,335

\*Value is based on what is currently listed on the ACPA website. Actual sale value will be based on updated appraisals obtained for the property as part of the acquisition process.

Sufficient budget exists in the Wild Spaces Public Places (WSPP) Land Allocation for these costs.

Project 6184160 – WSPP-General Operating and Due Diligence: 021.41.4160.537.31.00

Project 6194101 – WSPP-Land Acquisition: 021.41.4160.537.61.00

If the WSPP Surtax budget in Fund 021 is exhausted if/ when either of these parcels are brought to the Board for acquisition, they will be funded from the new surtax (beginning 1/1/23) with budget in Fund 140.

(Exhibit 5)

**Strategic Guide:**

Environment

**Background:**

Buck Bay Flatwoods – J.W.C. Farms Inc.: On June 06, 2023, John Cheatham nominated the subject property to the Alachua County Forever Program as a Conservation Easement. On July 27, 2023, the Land Conservation Board placed the 1,695+ acre Buck Bay Flatwoods – JWC Farms property in the Priority Pool as an acquisition project.

The JWC Farms project includes seven parcels (ACPA TPN 07559-000-000, 07539-001-000, 07539-002-000, 07539-000-000, 07574-000-000, 07570-000-000, and 07570-002-000) located in northern Alachua County just east of Lacrosse, at the intersection of CR 231 and CR 235. While the property is not directly adjacent to existing conservation lands, it is less than a tenth of a mile southwest of the Graham Conservation area along the Santa Fe River which is managed by the Suwannee River Water Management District, and it is less than a mile south of the Alachua County-held Running Over Ranch Conservation Easement. The northeast corner of the property is less than half a mile from the Santa Fe River. The natural communities present on the property include, but might not be limited to, flatwoods/prairie lake, basin marsh, basin swamp, blackwater stream, seepage stream, sinkhole, hydric hammock, and upland hardwood forest.

One of the most notable features on the property is the approximately 300-acre flatwoods/ prairie lake called Sunshine Lake that is in the south-central part of the property and is fringed by a diverse basin marsh. While this lake contains the majority of the wetland footprint on the property, additional

wetlands include a smaller lake in the northwest quadrant, basin swamps, sinkhole ponds, seepage creeks, and a portion of a blackwater stream (Rhuda Branch) that terminates into Sunshine Lake from the south, all of which appear to be in good condition.

The uplands on the property are primarily being managed as pine plantation and food plots. The pine plantations are a mixture of mixed-age slash and longleaf pines, and there is higher diversity of groundcover species than is often seen in sites with former pasture or pine plantation history. Forestry and land management practices follow detailed management plans that were written in consultation with both a professional forester and a professional biologist to maximize benefits for the forestry operation as well as for wildlife, especially white-tailed deer. Land management practices include mechanical treatment in the understory as well we use of prescribed fire. Overall, the results of the landowners' habitat restoration efforts were impressive in outcome, diversity and commitment. In addition to the broad ecological benefits that current management activities are achieving; the property is being specifically managed to benefit and regulate the white tailed deer population and facilitate hunting opportunities. To support deer forage, there are approximately 120 acres of food plots on the property, and forage crops are rotated regularly.

Invasive plants were only found in low density, scattered occurrences throughout the property, though we were not able to thoroughly traverse the site during the visit due to its size. The landowner has been actively managing for invasive species throughout his tenure of the property and is doing a good job of controlling them. Many animal species have been observed on the property by the landowner over the years, and staff observed northern bobwhite quail, white tailed deer, gopher tortoise, and Sherman's fox squirrels during the site visit. Two imperiled plant species were also observed during the site visit: milkvine, and southern lady fern.

Additional information can be found in the attached property evaluation.

(Exhibits 1 & 2)

Buck Bay Flatwoods – Burnsed: On June 07, 2023, Greg Driskell, a real estate agent representing Ray Burnsed, nominated the subject property to the Alachua County Forever Program for consideration as a fee simple purchase. On July 27, 2023, the Land Conservation Board placed the 280-acre Buck Bay Flatwoods – Burnsed property in the Priority Pool.

The Burnsed project includes three parcels (ACPA TPN 07588-000-000, 07613-000-000, and 0716-000-000). The property is located in north-central Alachua County, approximately 0.75 miles south of the Santa Fe River, near County Road 225. Immediately to the north of the Burnsed parcels are the Montechoa Creek Conservation Easement – owned by Loncala with the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) holding the Conservation Easement, and the Graham Conservation Area owned and managed by SRWMD. Just over half of the property is wetlands which include blackwater stream, seepage stream, floodplain swamp, bottomland forest, and depression marsh. The upland landcover types include upland hardwood forest, mesic flatwoods, wet flatwoods, and pine plantation.

Three blackwater streams come together on this property: Little Montechoa Creek, Montechoa Creek, and Deep Creek, all flowing north to the Santa Fe River. The creeks are each in excellent condition, and the confluence of these creeks occurs within the wetland system spanning across the Burnsed parcels and the adjacent land to the west. There appeared to be numerous side-channels associated with the creeks in the area where they come together, and it is expected that at times of high water this whole area likely floods into one contiguous floodplain. In addition to the blackwater streams, at least two seepage streams were identified on the property on the eastern edge of the main wetland system before the transition to the upland habitat types, which also appear to be in excellent condition.

Floodplain forest and bottomland forest made up the largest portions of the wetland system on

the property. Some portions of the floodplain forest had hardwoods and cypress harvested around 2005, but these areas appear to be recovering well. Both areas had a diversity of both canopy trees and understory species and appeared to be in excellent condition.

The vast majority of the uplands have been converted to pine plantation. Historic aerial images show much more open canopied habitat from the 1930's to 1950's before being logged and planted in dense pine rows beginning in the 50's and 60's. The current pine stand consists of unthinned slash pine, approximately 20 years old, with notable offsite hardwood encroachment. Based on historic aerial images and species observed on the site visit, it is likely that this area was once sandhill, upland pine, and/or a mix of other upland habitats. Additional upland landcovers include mesic and wet flatwoods which each have a small area present in the south and southwest portions of the property. They are in good condition but have not had fire in many years and likely once occupied a larger footprint before human alteration over the past several decades.

Overall, there were not many invasive species observed on the property. One small patch of Japanese climbing fern was observed adjacent to a trail, and a few mimosa and camphor trees were seen in various parts of the parcels. Several listed species were identified on the property including southern lady fern (state threatened), Florida milkvine (state endangered), and royal fern, cinnamon fern, and pinxter azalea (all listed as commercially exploited).

Additional information can be found in the attached property evaluation.

(Exhibit 3 & 4)

General:

The staff recommendation is based on the addition of these properties to the Priority Pool by the Land Conservation Board as outlined in Resolution 22-066.

As with all Alachua County conservation lands, if accepted as an acquisition, this property will go through the vetting process for the Registry of Protected Places.

Comp Plan Reference:

Policy 6.0 Land Conservation Program within the Conservation and Open Space Element, states "Establish and maintain a land conservation program for the purchase, preservation, and management of natural areas and open space to complement the regulatory approaches identified in other section of this element."