



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 24-00326

Agenda Date: 4/9/2024

Agenda Item Name:

Chair Letter supporting management of conservation lands in proposed Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor, Florida Forever Project Area.

Presenter:

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Description:

Chair Letter supporting management of conservation lands in proposed Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor, Florida Forever Project Area.

Recommended Action:

Request Board approve and authorize a Chair letter to Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Division of State Lands supporting management of conservation lands in proposed Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor, Florida Forever Project Area (Exhibit 1).

Prior Board Motions:

On December 11, 2011, the Board executed the cooperative management agreement for Little Orange Creek Preserve with Alachua Conservation Trust.

Fiscal Note:

There is no additional cost or guaranteed budget commitment for this board action. For any properties acquired through the Florida Forever Program, all land acquisition costs will be paid by State of Florida. If acquired, this Florida Forever Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor project area will save Alachua County the cost of acquisition for any of these properties. No County land management funds will be expended on properties outside of Alachua County. A final lease agreement for any acquired properties will be brought back to the Board for consideration, including anticipated land stewardship costs and fund sources, before any County land management responsibilities would be finalized.

Strategic Guide:

Environment

Background:

The Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor is a proposed Florida Forever Project Area planned for submission to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Division of State Lands. Putnam Land Conservancy, a local non-profit land trust working in Alachua, Putnam, and other

surrounding counties has prepared the project area proposal. The deadline for submission of new proposed Florida Forever Project Areas to DEP for the current project cycle is April 15, 2024.

The proposed Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor project area includes six Alachua County tax parcels which are already on the Alachua County Active Acquisition List, and twenty four parcels which have not yet been nominated to the Alachua County Forever Program (see Exhibit 2 in blue), and one parcel in Putnam County, adjacent to Little Orange Creek Preserve (see Exhibit 2 in purple). This corridor has been identified to connect Alachua county's 6,300 acre Lochloosa Slough Preserve, with the nearly 2,900 acre Little Orange Creek Nature Preserve, jointly owned by Alachua County, Alachua Conservation Trust, and the City of Hawthorne. If the Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor is approved as a Florida Forever Project area, properties within the project area would qualify for acquisition by the state with Florida Forever funding. However, when Florida Forever project areas are proposed, a land management commitment must be available for the project area parcels, from a federal state or municipal partner. Putnam Land Conservancy has requested that Alachua County provide the initial management commitment for the project area proposal.

This chair letter provides initial commitment for land stewardship support in this proposed Florida Forever Project area. Prior to any final commitment of county resources, staff would request Board authorization to pursue a lease agreement with the state DEP for each parcel proposed for acquisition by the state, and would return to the Board for approval for return to the Board with an agreement for and to execute a lease agreement with DEP for each parcel approved and acquired.

Staff would also request Board authorization assign management responsibility for Alachua County parcel TPN 19315-000-000 and Putnam County parcel TPN 30-10-23-0000-0040-0000 to be managed by Alachua Conservation Trust as a part of Little Orange Creek Preserve. Located in both Alachua and Putnam counties, Little Orange Creek Preserve is a conservation land property owned in partnership by three entities: Alachua County, Alachua Conservation Trust, and the City of Hawthorne. Alachua Conservation Trust serves as land manager for the entire preserve, through management agreements with Alachua County and the other partners, and management of these two parcels would also be the responsibility of Alachua Conservation Trust through amendment of the current management agreement for the preserve.

Support of this Florida Forever project area proposal achieves the County's conservation objectives using Florida Forever rather than local funds for conservation land acquisition. If acquired, management of these parcels may be provided in a cost-effective manner in conjunction with other nearby lands that County and partner staff are already managing. Alachua County has previously made a management commitment for a Florida Forever program conservation land acquisition, at Little Lake Santa Fe Preserve (Lake Santa Fe – Murphey property), which facilitated state acquisition of that Florida Forever property.