

Alachua County Land Conservation and
Management Program/Alachua County Forever
Program

Land Management Planning and Implementation
Process Summary

Introduction

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 land stewardship; 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. Each property purchased occupies a spot on a continuum of conservation value; conservation value here defined as including ecological functions and benefits as well as recreational opportunities. The "No Net Loss of Conservation Values" principle means that each year, the property must be either moving forward along that continuum towards better conservation value, or at worst, remain in place. It should not degrade. In this way, the principles governing the stewardship of Alachua County's nature preserves are no different than those for the Courthouse, an active park, the Administration Building or a fire truck. Each is a capital asset, held in trust for the public benefit. Each has an acquisition and an operational cost. Land stewardship strategies and practices applied under this principle are similar to those applied to other public conservation lands in the state and nation and follow established best management practices and current habitat restoration science and research, where those are available.

Process

Successful conservation and stewardship of environmental lands is dependent on the quality of the management planning and implementation process. The management plans are written and implemented to protect preserve and enhance the unique natural and cultural resources found on the properties and to provide an enjoyable and education passive recreational experience. Management plans describe broad goals and estimate an implementation schedule. They are adapted in response to new priorities, changing conditions, expanding scientific knowledge and evolving best management practices. For all that, they must remain true to the original funding covenants and restrictions.

Alachua County Comprehensive Plan Conservation & Open Space Element Policy 6.6 and Section 6 of Alachua County Resolution 22-066 provides guidance for management planning, management plans and management implementation. The Resolution: "A conceptual management plan shall be developed for the acquired property within twelve (12) months of closing and adopted by the [Board of County Commissioners]. The plan may be amended as additional parcels within the same project are acquired." To augment that guidance, staff has

had the BoCC adopt several Business Plans to guide decision-making specifically for timber harvesting, grazing and recreational hunting on County preserves. These are available on the Alachua County Forever Land Conservation Program website (www.alachuacountyforever.us).

Land Conservation Program staff is responsible for the development of these management plans for ACF preserves. The management planning process described below was originally developed by the Land Conservation Stewardship Team (LCST) in 2003 and is based upon generally-used best practices. It was updated in 2014 to comply with the Resolution 22-066 to incorporate the Land Conservation Board (LCB) into the review process.

Management Plan Review and Approval Process For County-Managed Property

1. Site Assessment and Initial Outreach: to gather information about interests and concerns regarding the property.
2. Plan Drafting:
 - 2.1. Site manager reviews information from the initial evaluation of the property, anecdotal information from the previous owners of the property, GIS data, historic records, aerial maps, and site visits.
 - 2.2. Site manager drafts plan.
 - 2.3. Draft plan reviewed senior staff and plan revised as necessary.
 - 2.4. Draft plan reviewed by any granting agencies requiring management plan approval, and plan revised as necessary.
 - 2.5. Draft plan made available to public, partners and property neighbors. The Plan is sent to the LCB, the neighbors within a ¼ mile of the preserve, stakeholders, and the ACF list of interested parties. Alternative formats are made available upon request.
3. Public meeting on draft plan (held in a publicly accessible location reasonably near the property):
 - 3.1. Present draft plan.
 - 3.2. Public comment; oral presentations, and comment cards. Meetings can be recorded and staff may take notes on key points.
4. Staff revises draft plan as necessary.
5. Request required official approval of draft plan from any granting agency/entity. Staff revises draft plan as necessary to comply with granting agency approval.
6. Draft plan is brought before the Land Conservation Board (LCB). Interested parties are invited to attend the meeting. At this meeting the LCB will make a formal recommendation on the draft plan for the County Commission.
7. Draft stewardship plan is placed on the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners' agenda for review and action. LCB recommendation and public comments are included in the Board item.

The following steps are performed concurrently with the development of the management plan:

8. The preserve manager reviews site security with the Program Manager and staff and determines if there are any immediate actions needed to maintain site security. Immediate actions may include fencing, gates, locks,

perimeter signage, road repairs, erosion mitigation, firelines and fire breaks.

9. Initial resource management actions are initiated such as prescribed burning, invasive plant control, timber harvests, removal of solid waste, and securing the property against illegal dumping, looting of cultural resources and damage to natural resources.
10. Every year, ACF prepares an annual workplan which contains the stewardship tasks to be completed to keep the preserve on the proper stewardship trajectory.
11. Management Plans must be reviewed at least every ten years, or more often depending on the granting agency requirements. Plans can also be revised if circumstances change so significantly that the vision it describes cannot be realized. A management plan that contains major revisions that may affect neighbors, go back through this process starting from step 3. Minor revisions may go back only as far as step 7.
12. New property acquisitions which are functionally added to the management of an existing preserve with an established management plan will be managed under the established management plan structure, until the formal plan review period for that preserve is reached. If the newly acquired property includes unique or significant features which necessitate additional immediate planning focus, the exiting preserve plan will be updated and amended within 18 month of acquisition to address those features.

Checklist of Considerations in Management Plan Development

- A) Has the original site evaluation information and add other information developed by staff through research and site visits been used?
- B) Is there any useful anecdotal information available that was not included?
- C) Are the following sections present in the draft management plan? (Not all may be applicable).
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| 1) INTRODUCTION | 35) GREENWAYS |
| 2) LOCATION & ADJACENT USES | 36) PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT |
| 3) ACQUISITION HISTORY | 37) MAINTENANCE |
| 4) NATURAL RESOURCES SUMMARY | 38) SECURITY |
| 5) PREVIOUS USES | 39) STAFFING |
| 6) RECREATION | 40) MONITORING AND REPORTING |
| 7) PURPOSE | 41) REFERENCES |
| 8) PRIORITIZED MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES | 42) MANAGEMENT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION CHART |
| 9) COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CONSISTENCY | 43) EXHIBITS AND APPENDICES: |
| 10) LAND USE AND ZONING | i) LOCATION MAP |
| 11) NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES | ii) PUBLIC LANDS MAP |
| 12) SOILS | iii) ACQUISITION HISTORY |
| 13) HYDROLOGY AND GEOLOGY | iv) PLATTED PORTIONS |
| 14) NATURAL AND ALTERED COMMUNITIES | v) SOILS MAP |
| 15) INVASIVE EXOTIC PLANTS | vi) CONSERVATION EASEMENT DOCUMENTATION |
| 16) RESTORATION | vii) NATURAL COMMUNITIES MAP |
| 17) PRESCRIBED FIRE | viii) MANAGEMENT ZONE MAP |
| 18) FERAL ANIMAL PROGRAM | ix) STAND MAP |
| 19) LISTED SPECIES | x) CONCEPTUAL SITE MAP |
| 20) INVENTORY OF NATURAL COMMUNITIES AND BIOTA | xi) FLORIDA ECOLOGICAL GREENWAYS NETWORK |
| 21) CULTURAL RESOURCES | xii) EMERALD NECKLACE |
| 22) FOREST RESOURCES | xiii) PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT & COMMENTS |
| 23) SITE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT | xiv) AGENCY COMMENT |
| 24) ACKNOWLEDGEMENT SIGN | xv) GRANTING AGENCY, REQUIRED NOTICES & DECLARATION OF RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS |
| 25) EXISTING PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS | xvi) DEEDS |
| 26) PROPOSED PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS | xvii) SOIL DESCRIPTIONS |
| 27) WETLAND BUFFER | xviii) LEASES, LICENSE AGREEMENTS, AND RESERVED RIGHTS |
| 28) STORMWATER FACILITIES | |
| 29) EDUCATION SIGNS | |
| 30) EDUCATION PROGRAM | |
| 31) PERMITS | |
| 32) EASEMENTS, CONCESSIONS, AND LEASES | |
| 33) MANAGEMENT NEEDS | |
| 34) COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT | |

Alachua County Comprehensive Plan Sections Relevant to Land Stewardship and Land Management Planning

Alachua County Comprehensive Plan: 2019-2040 (Effective 12/13/2019)
Conservation and Open Space Element

OBJECTIVE 6.2 - ALACHUA COUNTY FOREVER

Implement the Alachua County Forever program.

Policy 6.2.1 The County shall establish and maintain the Alachua County Forever program to acquire and manage environmentally significant lands for the protection of water resources, wildlife habitat, and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation.

Policy 6.2.3 The emphasis of Alachua County Forever shall be to increase the acreage of environmentally significant lands managed in perpetuity for conservation purposes.

Policy 6.2.7 Resource-based recreation may be considered on and adjacent to land acquired through Alachua County Forever provided the associated activities do not have significant adverse impacts on the ecological integrity or ecological or historical values of the resources in these areas.

OBJECTIVE 6.3 - ECOLOGICALLY FUNCTIONAL LINKAGES

Develop a linked network of protected natural areas and open space that can be managed to support the protection, enhancement and restoration of functional and connected natural systems while providing unique opportunities for recreation, and economic development.

Policy 6.3.1 The County shall prioritize maintenance of ecologically functional linkages between ecological corridor core areas as shown on the [Critical Ecological Corridors Map](#) through various programs and activities, including:

- (a) Implementation of development review
- (b) Special area planning for Strategic Ecosystems
- (c) Land acquisition programs and associated management plans
- (d) Transfer of Development Rights program (see Future Land Use Element Section 9.0)
- (e) Intergovernmental coordination efforts with municipalities, adjacent counties, regional entities, state and federal agencies
- (f) Outreach programs to promote the value of conserving linked ecosystems/corridors and support tax incentives that promote the preservation of mapped ecological core areas.

Policy 6.3.3 To protect sensitive ecosystems and habitat corridors, the County shall locate and design public access in an environmentally sensitive manner, including limiting or prohibiting public access where necessary to protect such resources.

OBJECTIVE 6.6 – MANAGEMENT

Improve the environmental stewardship of all preservation, conservation and recreation areas within Alachua County.

Policy 6.6.1 The County shall provide public education on the benefits of natural systems functions to decrease the effects of human intrusion into areas designated for limited public access.

Policy 6.6.2 The County shall take an active role in the development of management plans for preservation, conservation and recreation areas in Alachua County that are not owned by the County.

Policy 6.6.3 The County shall continue to manage natural resources in County- owned preservation areas in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Suwannee River and St. Johns River Water Management Districts, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, local municipalities, and other agencies, as appropriate.

Policy 6.6.4 Within one year of acquisition, the County shall develop site specific management plans for all preservation, conservation and recreation lands owned, leased or purchased by the County. The County shall review these plans periodically, at least every three years, to ensure compliance with conservation objectives.

Policy 6.6.5 The County shall restore and enhance degraded natural areas on County-owned preservation, conservation and recreation lands, including removal of invasive non-native plants and animals, reforestation, re-establishment of burn regimes for fire-adapted ecosystems, and restoration of shorelines and natural hydrology, as needed.

Policy 6.6.6 The County shall manage and maintain County-owned preservation, conservation and recreation areas to ensure the ongoing conservation of desirable plants and animals and their associated ecosystems, and to control the invasion and spread of undesirable non-native plants and animals.

Policy 6.6.7 Management techniques such as prescribed burning and mechanical removal shall be used in County-owned preservation, conservation and recreation areas where necessary and appropriate for ecological reasons or fuel reduction.

Policy 6.6.8 Where consistent with natural resources protection, the County may provide public access to preservation and conservation areas, including water bodies. A hierarchy will be established to determine the appropriate type of access, with special attention given to environmentally sensitive design, location and construction.

Policy 6.6.9 Multiple use opportunities, including resource-based recreation, shall be considered in County-owned preservation and conservation areas where consistent with conservation of wildlife habitat, watershed protection, erosion control, maintenance or enhancement of water quality, and aquifer recharge protection.

Policy 6.6.10 The County shall manage, and support stewardship strategies that maximize biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels.

Policy 6.6.11 The County shall provide continued funding for ongoing operation and maintenance costs associated with County-owned lands.

Board of County Commissioners Guiding Principles for the Alachua County Forever Program and Stewardship of Acquired Lands

The BoCC agreed to adopt the following Guiding Principles at the Land Conservation workshop held on January 14th, 2002. The BoCC formally adopted the following Guiding Principles at their February 26th, 2002 regular commission meeting (Item # 42R-022602).

1. Certain administrative and operating expenses of the program may be borne by the General Fund. There are competing needs for County services using the General Fund and the services and benefits of land conservation to the community must be considered in the context of those other public needs. Additional sources of program support may need to be developed to support the operating costs, e.g. user fees.
2. Commercial Pooled Paper should be used to initially acquire properties until the appropriate time to issue the ACF Bonds. All costs directly related to the acquisition of a project, whether or not it is successfully consummated, are reimbursable from the Bonds.
3. The ACF program will use the existing contracts where appropriate and develop new contracts or the internal capacity where there is a deficiency in expertise or resources in the community. The BoCC recognizes the great value of using ACF funds to leverage partnerships in the protection of the county's sensitive lands. The County has the fiduciary responsibility for ACF funds and therefore will require BoCC approval prior to any application being made regarding committing funds in such partnerships.
4. The BoCC is aware that there are long term stewardship costs associated with projects selected but no funding source other than the General Fund Reserves has been identified. To minimize stewardship expenses while the Program is in this initial acquisition phase, staff will use a strategy of "no loss of conservation values" stewardship. The initial stewardship program will reflect this strategy. As the program matures and other funding sources materialize, the stewardship program may be enhanced.
5. Any stewardship of ACF sites shall be consistent with the ACF's primary goal of preserving, restoring and enhancing environmental values. A stewardship plan will be developed within 12 months of acquisition and made available for public comment prior to BoCC approval.
6. Every effort must be made to maintain the public's confidence and trust so that this Program may be sustained.