



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 24-00566

Agenda Date: 6/25/2024

Agenda Item Name:

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

Presenter:

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

Description:

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

1. Santa Fe River – Robinson (Full Price List)
2. Lochloosa Forest – Levy Prairie Connector – Wood, Ashley & Sara-Nett (“Wood”) (Full Price List)
3. Watermelon Pond – Dumford & Palmer (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 option contracts. Any option contract will be brought back to the Board for consideration.

Recommended Action:

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

1. Santa Fe River – Robinson (Full Price List)
2. Lochloosa Forest – Levy Prairie Connector – Wood, Ashley & Sara-Nett (“Wood”) (Full Price List)
3. Watermelon Pond – Dumford & Palmer (Full Price List)

Prior Board Motions:

None

Fiscal Note:

Santa Fe River – Robinson (Fee Simple or Conservation Easement) - Cost Estimates:

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10-year stewardship (fee simple): \$178,785

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10-year stewardship (easement): \$125,688

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$302.55

Lochloosa Forest – Levy Prairie Connector – Wood (Conservation Easement) - Cost Estimates:

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10-year stewardship: \$636,303

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$125,688

Watermelon Pond – Dumford & Palmere (Fee Simple) - Cost Estimates:

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10-year stewardship: \$146,210

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$756.93

Purchase and maintenance would be funded from Wild Spaces Public Places surtax.

Additional details can be found in Exhibits 7 and 8

Strategic Guide:

Environment

Background:

Santa Fe River – Robinson: On March 29, 2024, Leela Robinson nominated the subject property to the Alachua County Forever Program (ACF) for consideration as a fee simple or a conservation easement purchase. On May 23, 2024, the Land Conservation Board (LCB) placed the 22.61-acre Santa Fe River – Robinson property in the Priority Pool. The Robinson project includes two parcels (Alachua County Property Appraiser Tax Parcel Numbers (ACPA TPN) 02750-009-000 and 02750-013-000) under one ownership. The property is in northern Alachua County along County Road 1491 just south of the Matthews Tract which was purchased by ACF in February 2023. It is approximately 0.8 mile south of the Santa Fe River, which is designated as an Outstanding Florida Water.

The majority of the property is improved pasture with approximately 1-acre of organic u-pick blueberries. Natural communities present on the property include a sinkhole lake, farm pond, and successional hardwoods. The sinkhole lake is in the northwestern portion of the property and is in good condition. The vegetation in and surrounding this feature includes rush species, pickerel weed, button bush, hickory species, magnolias, southern red cedar, and successional hardwoods. It has been stocked with largemouth bass and tilapia to help control some of the aquatic vegetation in lieu of using herbicides. The farm pond is in the southeastern portion of the property and is in good to fair condition. Vegetation in and around the farm pond is limited to grass species, rush species, spatterdock, and pickerel weed. The eastern side of the farm pond is beginning to regenerate with pole sized successional hardwoods.

Additional information can be found in the attached site evaluation. (Exhibits 1 and 2)

Lochloosa Forest – Levy Prairie Connector – Wood, Ashley & Sara-Nett: The Ashley Wood and Jane Wood properties (now the Wood, Ashley and Sara-Nett property) were originally presented to LCB on October 27, 2005. At the time, no properties were conserved in the vicinity, but the connecting parcels to the NW were being pursued as part of Conservation Trust for Florida’s expansion boundary. At the time, the LCB chose to table discussion until the larger project could be discussed. In July 2008, ACF purchased a conservation easement on the 136-acre Wood property across SE CR 225 from the subject property from a different family member. On April 03, 2024, Ashley Wood renominated the subject property to the Alachua County Forever Program for consideration as a conservation easement purchase. On May 23, 2024, the Land Conservation Board placed the 41.59-acre Lochloosa Forest- Levy Prairie Connector – Wood, Ashley and Sara-Nett property in the Priority Pool. The Wood, Ashley and Sara-Nett project includes three parcels (ACPA TPN 19871-000-000 and 19871-001-000) under one ownership. The property is located in southern Alachua County east of

Micanopy, and approximately 0.5 miles west of Orange Lake, which is designated as an Outstanding Florida Water.

Staff met with the landowner on April 30, 2024 and determined that conditions onsite remain largely unchanged from the 2005 evaluation. The majority of the property is improved pasture that is being used for cattle grazing, which the landowner wishes to retain with a conservation easement. The upland mixed forest remains in fair-poor condition, but it does still have some tree diversity including red oak, pignut hickory, and mockernut hickory. The landowner would love to be able to retain and regenerate the hardwood diversity. There are two homesites on the property including the owner's residence and a historic family house that was built in the mid-1800s.

Control of invasive species is still a challenge on this property, but the landowner is actively working to manage things to the best of his ability. There are four bald eagle nests within one mile of the property. There used to be an eagle nest onsite, but the nest tree fell several years ago, and the eagles have relocated to the adjacent land. There is one osprey nest in the old windmill by the historic home, and the landowner regularly observes sandhill cranes on the property.

Additional information can be found in the attached site evaluations. (Exhibits 3 and 4)

Watermelon Pond – Dumford & Palmer: On April 10, 2024, Jill Dumford nominated the subject property to the Alachua County Forever Program for consideration as a fee simple purchase. On May 23, 2024, the Land Conservation Board placed the 53.92-acre Watermelon Pond – Dumford and Palmer property in the Priority Pool.

The property is located in southwestern Alachua County on CR 337 and includes one parcel (ACPA TPN 02697-002-000). It is within the Watermelon Pond ACF project area, and 99% of the property falls within the Watermelon Pond strategic ecosystem. A tract of Goethe State Forest is located directly across CR 337 to the east, and there are additional tracts within a half-mile to the north and south.

The entire property is sandhill with minimal human impact, very little successional hardwood encroachment, and wide range of species diversity. Despite lack of evidence of prescribed fire, the sandhill appears to be in good condition. Mature longleaf pines, bluejack oaks, and turkey oaks are found throughout, and young longleaf pines are regenerating naturally. Wiregrass is abundant in the understory, along with love grass, lopsided Indian grass, Florida rosemary, sandhill milkweed, butterfly weed, and other native species.

The landowner currently lives in a mobile home in the western part of the property. She currently plans to move the residence to a small footprint along CR 337 for better access for emergency services and sell the remaining property to the county.

Additional information can be found in the attached site evaluation. (Exhibits 5 and 6)

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.”