



Alachua County Forever & Agricultural Land Protection Strategy

Strategy Development Update
BOCC Special Policy Meeting 06/04/24

Andi Christman, Land Conservation Program Manager

The Strategy Development

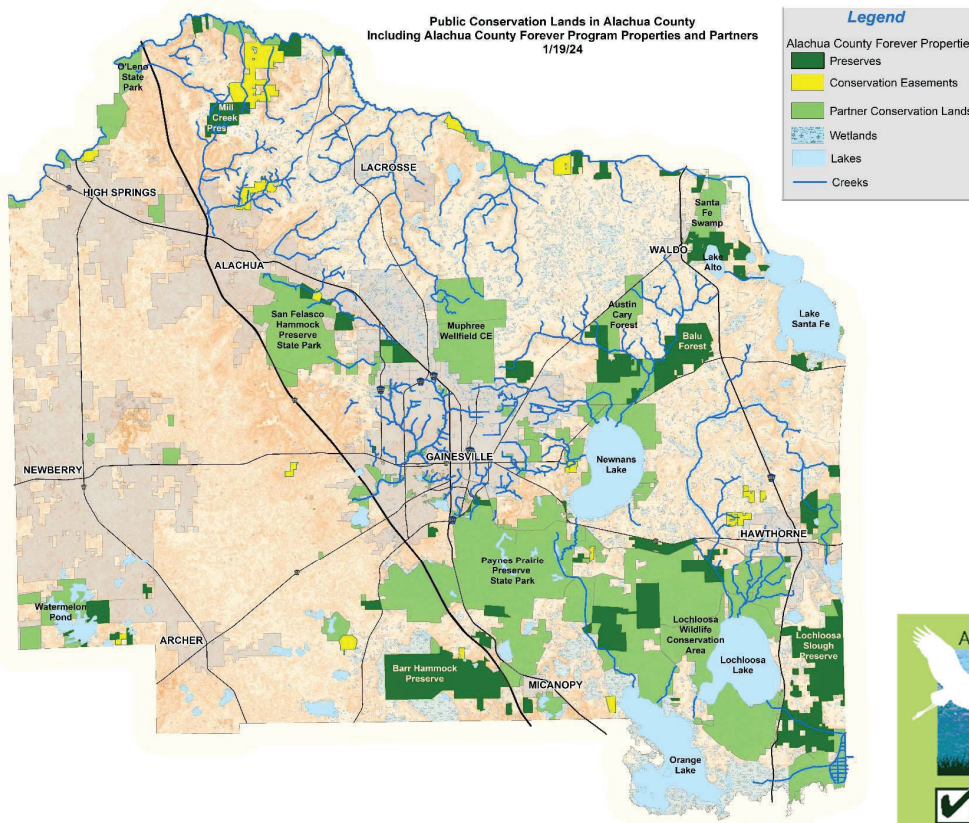
- Building on the Alachua County Forever Program and Process:
 - 1) **Develop a strategy framework and process to provide for better inclusion of agricultural lands in land conservation process.**
 - 2) Plan for likely implementation, likely as a sub-strategy under the Alachua County Forever Program.
- Present framework to the Board of County Commissioners, citizens, and stakeholders for input and review.
- Implement according to BOCC Direction.



How does ACF Protect Environmentally Significant Lands?

Through purchase of Land, and of Development Rights from willing landowners, and management & restoration of those lands to protect water resources, wildlife habitat, & provide recreational access.

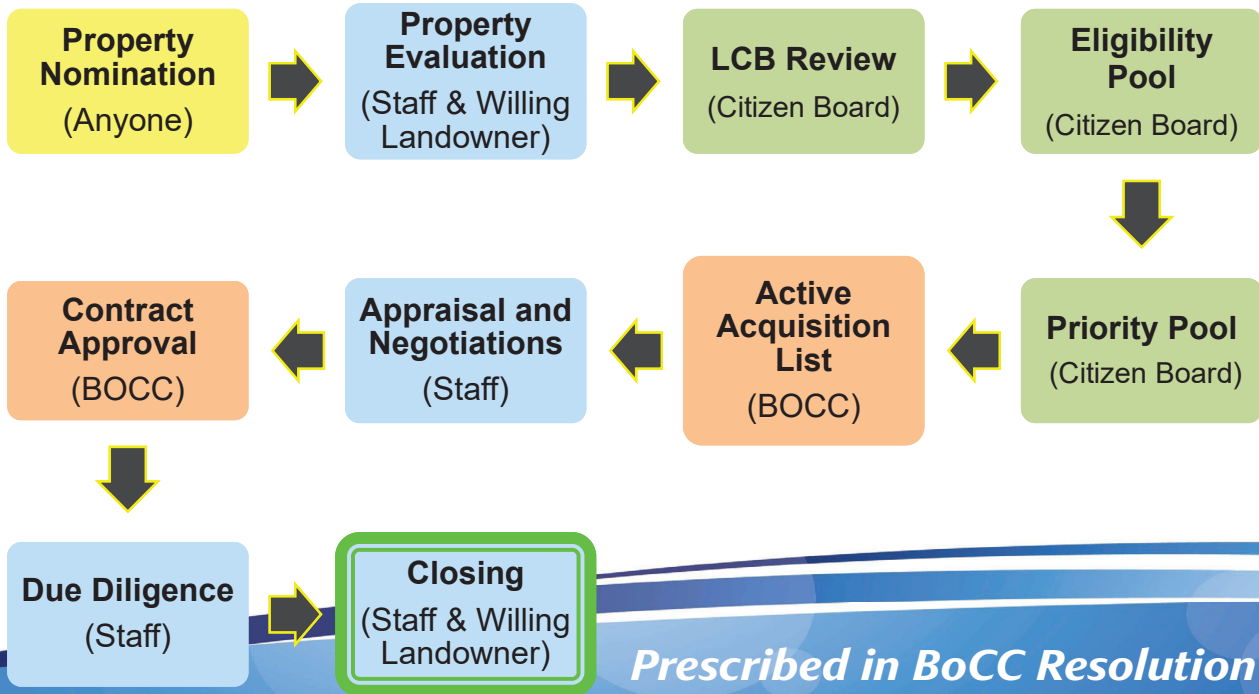
© alison blakeslee



**Alachua
County
Forever:**
*24 years &
34,000+ acres
protected*



What is the Land Acquisition Process?



Santa Fe River Corridor

- Santa Fe River
- Hornsby Springshed

Florida Wildlife Corridor

- Lakes Santa Fe and Alto
- Austin Cary Flatwoods
- Lochloosa Creek & Slough

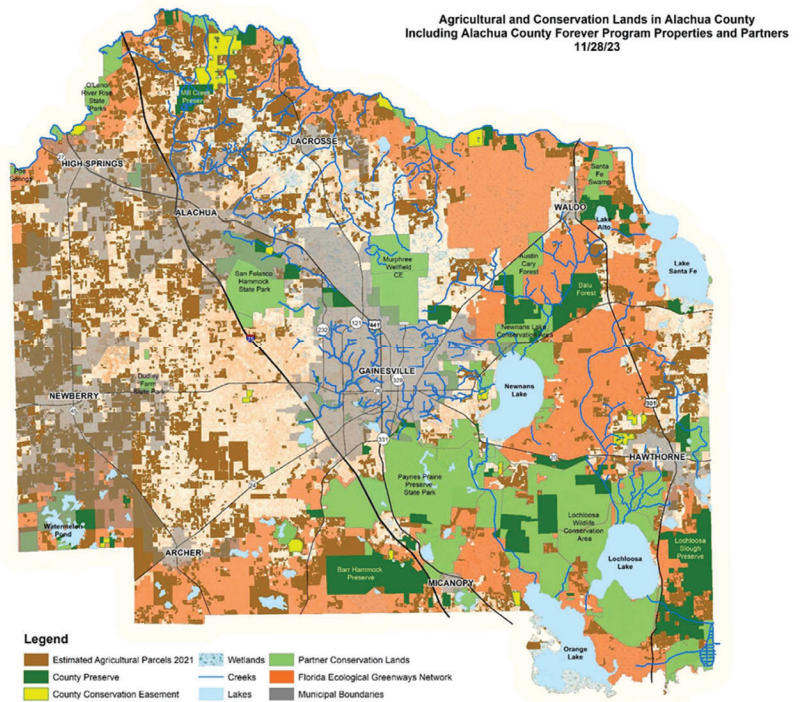
Southern Corridor

- Barr Hammock
- Watermelon Pond

Agricultural Land Protection

- Strengthening all Corridors
- Water Quality & Recharge
- Local Food Production

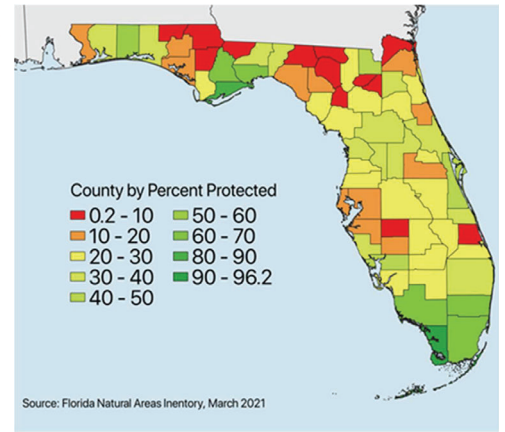
A Corridor-Based Strategy



Essential Levels of Protection

- **The 30 x 30 Target**

- Protecting 30% of land and water by 2030
- “*the minimum commitment to protect essential ecosystem services and buffer against the worst impacts of climate change”*”
- **43,000 more acres** need protection to conserve 30% of County.



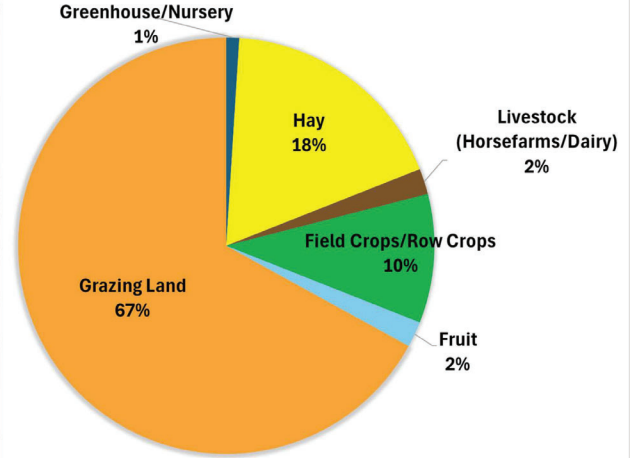
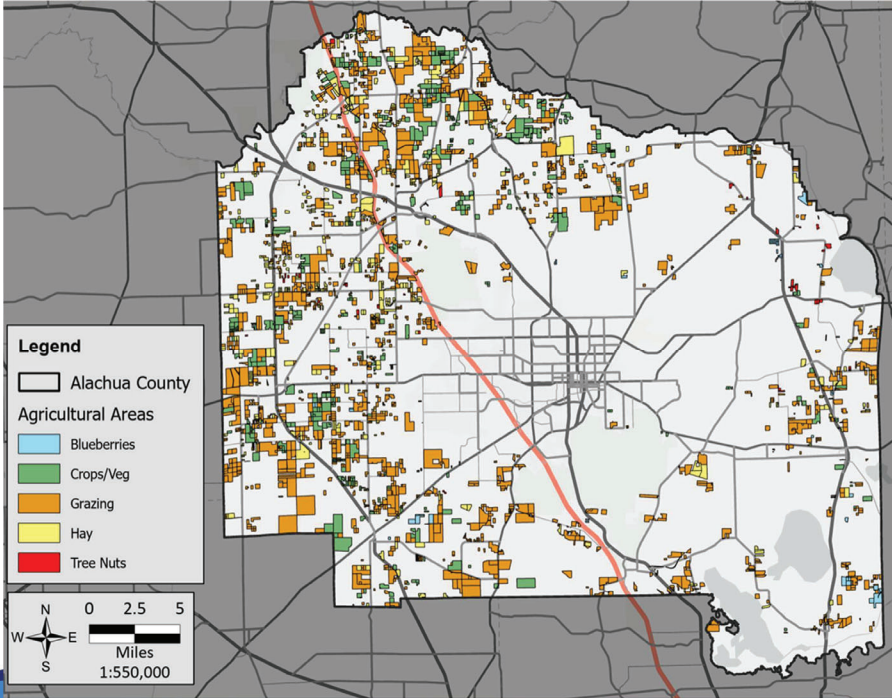
- **All efforts must include:**

- Corridors
- Wetlands and Water Resources
- Imperiled Species and Sites
- Diverse Habitats
- **Agricultural Land Protection**

How can ACF Protect Working Agricultural Lands?

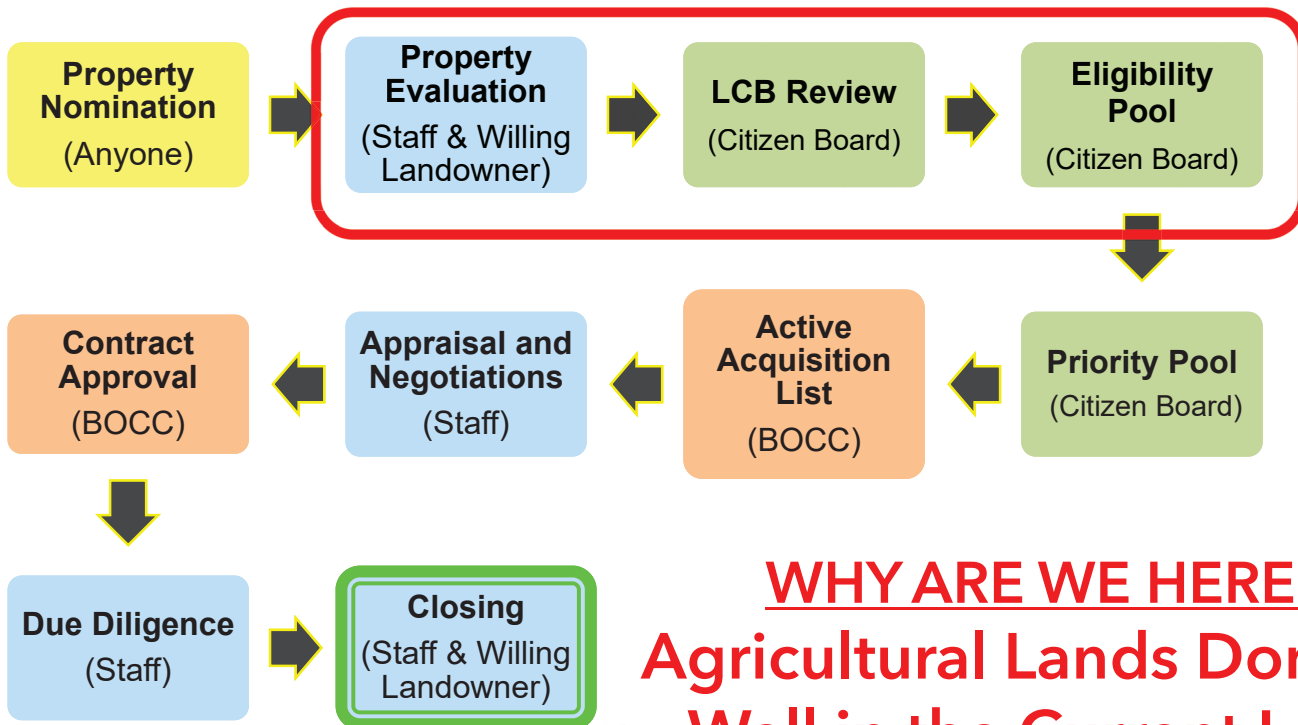
Through purchase of Development Rights from willing landowners and establishment of Conservation Easements focused on allowing continued agricultural practices.

Agricultural Properties in Alachua County



Since 1950:

- 50% Population Increase
- 50% Farmland Loss



WHY ARE WE HERE?
Agricultural Lands Don't Fit Well in the Current Land Ranking & Review Process

What's allowable Using WSPP Funds?

- The County Attorney's Office has determined that acquisition of conservation easements is an allowable use of Local Government Infrastructure Surtax funds, as conducted in accordance with FL Statute 704.06.



- The following requirements are established:
 - Easements are perpetual
 - Allows for continuation of current or historic agricultural uses.
 - Activities must be in accordance with BMPs

Agricultural Land Protection Strategy



PLANNED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- **Study: Year 1-2** (*Initiated September 2023 with Alachua Conservation Trust*)
 - Status –Development of strategy framework is underway
 - Mission statement, goals – **FIRST DRAFT UNDER REVIEW**
 - Ranking Matrix & Scoring criteria– **FIRST DRAFT UNDER REVIEW**
 - GIS-based Strategic Agricultural Lands Ranking model–**SECOND DRAFT UNDER REVIEW**
 - Draft Resolution and County Process– **FIRST DRAFT UNDER REVIEW**
 - Estimate scope of staff and equipment needs for implementation– **FIRST DRAFT UNDER REVIEW**
 - Framework for constitution of Advisory Board– **FIRST DRAFT UNDER REVIEW**
 - Framework for matching county resources with partner conservation programs
 - Develop Economic Impact Report for implementation
 - Stakeholder engagement and citizen outreach – **Stakeholder Charette 11/28/23, BoCC Special Policy Update 12/5/23, Advisory Board Outreach (RCAC, EPAC, LCB)**
- **Acquisition of Easements: Year 3-10**

DRAFT – Strategy Goal

Establish a sub-strategy with ACF that prioritizes protection of working agricultural lands

Do We Include:

- Target Acreage?
- Target Resources?
- Economic Impact?

2022 Census of Agriculture (USDA) *Alachua County Data*

Farms (number)	1712
Land in farms (acres)	197,906
Average farm size (acres)	116
Median farm size (acres)	21
Total crop land (acres)	72,230
Harvested cropland (acres)	46,075

DRAFT - Mission Statement

To better protect Alachua County's agricultural resources through permanent conservation of farmland.



*Agricultural resources are the primary means of production, including the **land, soil, water, and people**, which together comprise our agricultural community.*



DISCUSSION POINT

Strategy Mission and Goals

15

Draft - Property Ranking Matrix

✓ **11 Screening Questions** – To be answered through property site visit, and desktop review (55 points max).

- Agricultural Zoning?
- Primary Ag Operation Type?
- Greater than 50% Ag Land?
- Less than 2/3 Forested?
- Known Hazardous Sites on the Property?
- # of Structures other than residences (Ag supporting?)
- % of Farm offered for Easement?
- Size of Easement (acres?)
- Landowner Timeline for Easement?
- Farm Ownership Structure?
- Agree to Fair Market Appraisal?
- Funding Partner in Place?

Draft - Property Ranking Matrix

✓ 9 Environmental Ranking Question (45 points max.)

- Property enrolled in BMPs?
- Landowner using regenerative farming practices?
- Aquifer recharge value?
- Property in Santa Fe River, Watermelon Pond, or TMDL Watershed?
- In Springs Focus Area?
- % of property in Wetland or Floodplain?
- Proximity to Conservation Lands
- Willing to have Mgt Plan for Wildlife, Water, Soil, Nutrients?
- Potential Habitat for Wildlife?

Draft - Property Ranking Matrix

✓ 3 Economic Questions (15 points max)

- Farm sells products consumed in local area?
- Property is ranked for cost share funding from partner entity?
- Does landowner purchase farm materials locally?

Draft - Property Ranking Matrix

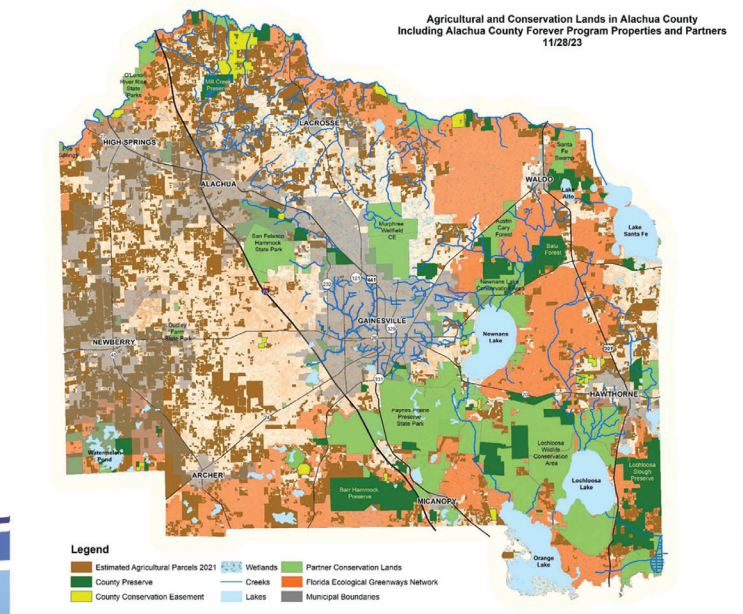
✓ 6 Social Questions (25 points max.)

- Landowner qualifies as “historically underserved” or “limited resource”?
- Landowner directly involved in mgt. and operation of property?
- Heir’s Property?
- Farm succession or transfer plan in place?
- Development Review (by EPD-NR staff).
- Immediate development threat adjacent to property?

Priorities Identified by other Programs

Criteria for Selected Farmland Protection Programs

Criteria	Programs
Productive capacity of soils	7
Proximity to public water or sewer	5
Development potential or probability of conversion	5
Produces specified or specialty crops	4
Percentage or minimum acreage in production	4
Presence of historic, scenic or environmental qualities	4
Location within specified zone	3
Relative size of the property	3
Exceeds minimum contiguous acreage	3
Proximity to existing or planned development	3
Enrollment in a conservation program	3
Amount or type of road frontage or access	3
Proximity to conserved lands	2
Capital investment in farm operation	2
Completion of a conservation and water quality plan	2
Adjacency of other agricultural lands	2
Current zoning	2
Identified for agriculture in comprehensive plan	2





DISCUSSION POINT

Matrix Scoring Criteria

Draft -Agricultural Land Suitability GIS Model

PURPOSE = to evaluate agricultural lands suitability for protection (via easement) using geospatial analysis.

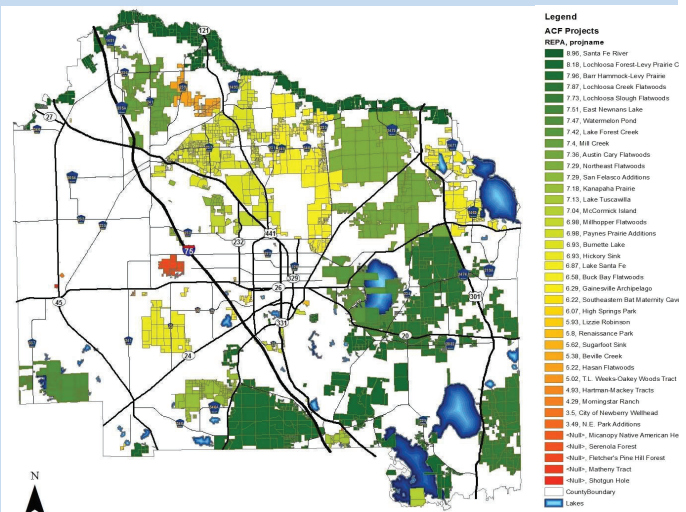
– Uses **8 datasets**, each scored from 1-5 for strategy suitability, and combined in model. Max Score = 40.

HIGH RANK/MOST SUITABLE LANDS:

- Geospatial model ranking = HIGH (5)
- Likelihood of cost-share \$\$ = HIGH

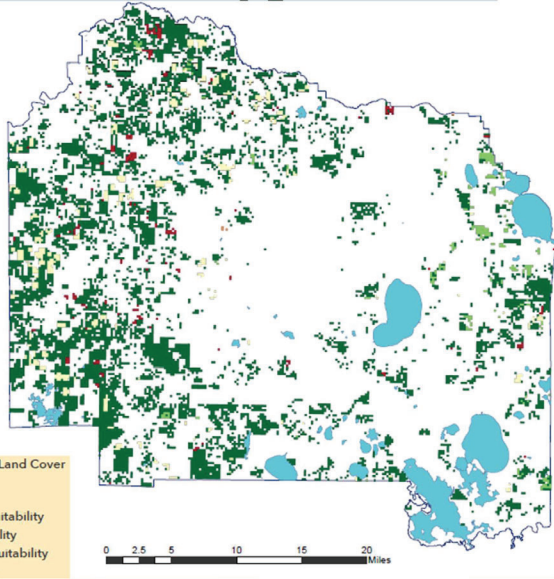
LOW RANK/LESS SUITABLE LANDS:

- Geospatial model ranking = LOW (1)
- Likelihood of cost-share \$\$ = LOW



Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#1 Agricultural Land Use Types



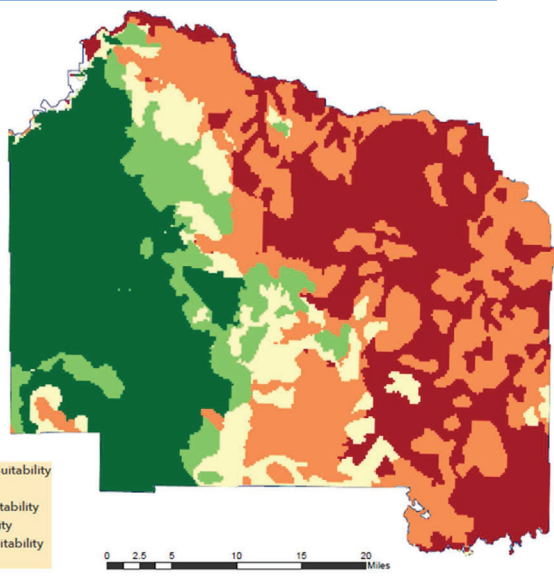
FDACS FSAID (FL Statewide Agricultural Irrigation Demand) data clipped to Alachua County. Utilizing this accurate agricultural land cover dataset in the suitability model ensures the model assesses agricultural land.

RANKS

- Livestock & Greenhouse = 1
- Aquaculture = 2
- Field Crops = 3
- Vegetables, Fruit (non citrus) = 4
- Grazing Land, Fallow, & Hay = 5

Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#2 Aquifer Recharge



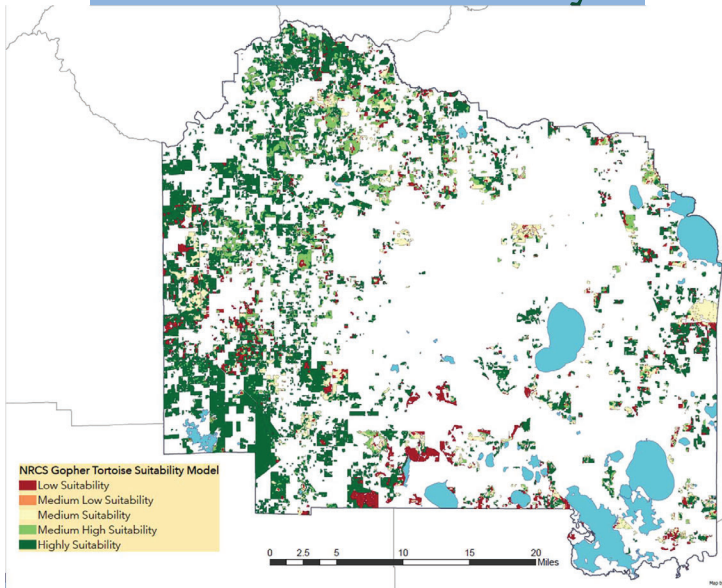
SRWMD Aquifer Recharge Data clipped to Alachua County. Protecting land in areas that promote aquifer recharge is critical to ensuring our water source is continually replenished.

RANKS

- Discharge = 1
- Recharge of 0-4 inches/year = 2
- Recharge of 4-8 inches/year = 3
- Recharge of 8-12 inches/year = 4
- Recharge of 12+ inches/year = 5

Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#3 Gopher Tortoise Habitat Suitability



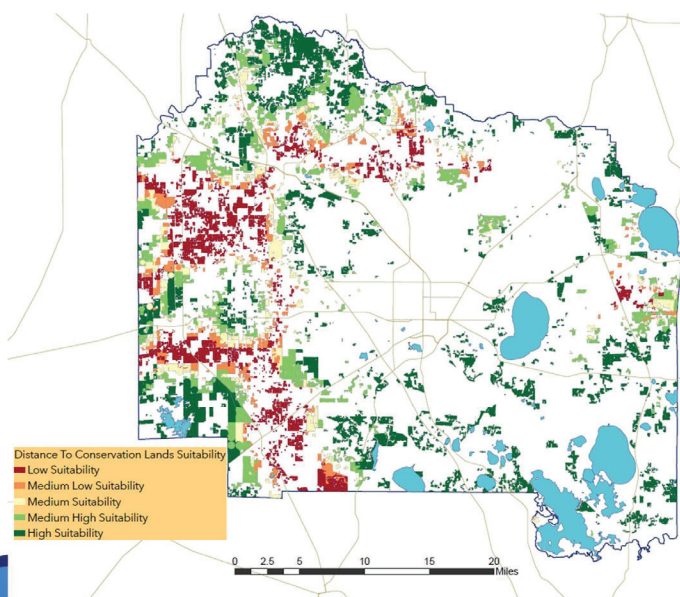
State threatened keystone species. Protection aligns with NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife goals. Model includes depth to water table, soil temperature, soil type, water deficits between rainfall and evapotranspiration, and “Major Land Resource Areas”.

RANKS

- Low Suitability for tortoises = 1
- Medium Suitability for tortoises = 3
- Med. High Suitability for tortoises = 4
- Highly Suited for tortoises = 5

Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#4 Proximity to Conservation Lands



FSAID 2021 Agricultural Parcels proximity to FLMA Conservation Lands. Identify and give preference to agricultural lands adjacent or in close proximity to existing conservation lands.

RANKS

- Greater than 2 miles distance = 1
- 1.5 mile to 2 mile distance = 2
- 1 mile to 1.5 mile distance = 3
- 0.5 to 1 mile distance = 4
- 0 to 0.5 mile distance = 5

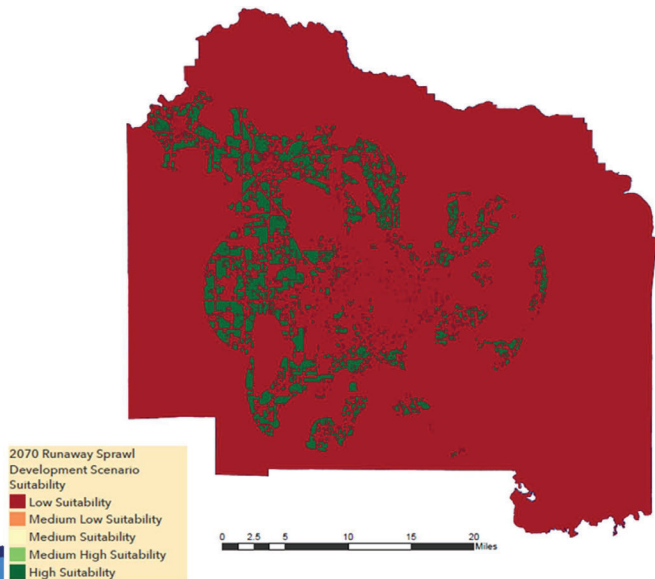
Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#5 Threat of Development

Florida 2070 Data. Conservation 2070 Sprawl Model. Sprawl 2070 captures a potential pattern of land use and associated population distribution for 2070, should all new development occur at the same development density as was present in each county in 2010.

RANKS

- Lands outside the predicted sprawl area = 1
- Lands inside the predicted sprawl area = 5



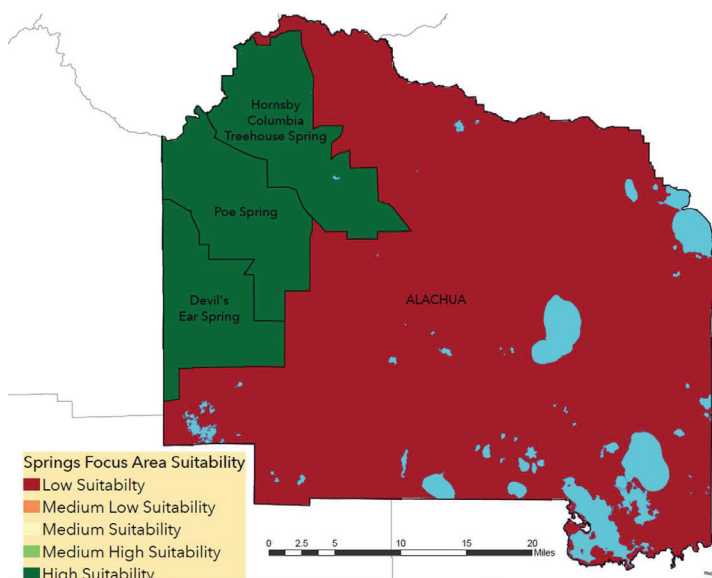
Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#6 Springs Priority Focus Area Protection

Land within the FLDEP and Alachua County designated Springs Priority Focus Areas (SPFA) can qualify for competitive DEP “Springs Restoration Funding” as cost share for easement acquisition. There are 3 SPFA’s in Alachua County, the “Columbia Hornsby Treehouse,” “Poe” and “Devil’s Ear”.

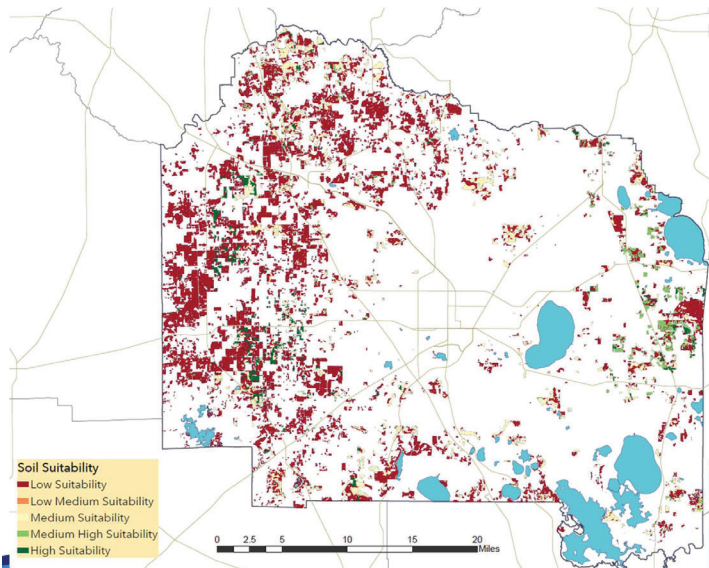
RANKS

- Lands outside a springs priority focus area = 1
- Lands inside a springs priority focus area = 5



Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#7 Soil Crop Productivity



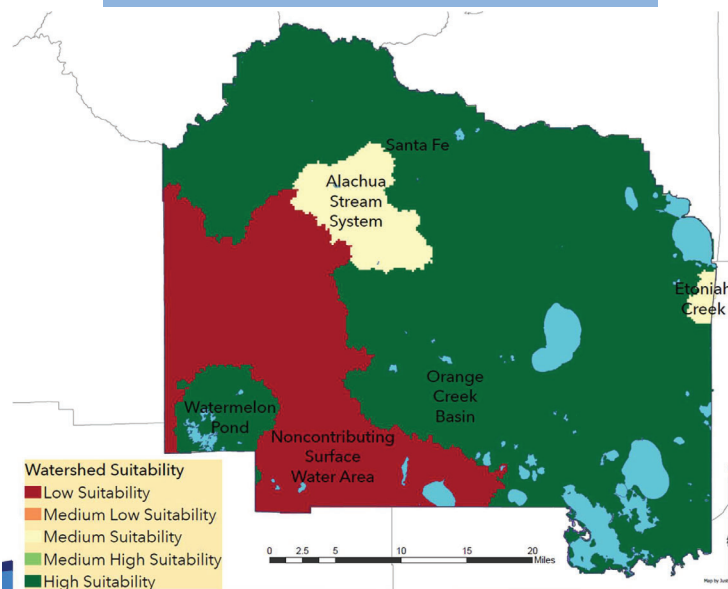
SSURGO (Soil Survey Geographic Database). Crop productivity for a given soil type assigns a value for that soils ability to grow food. Prioritizes protecting agricultural land for the future of food production.

RANKS

- Least productive soils = 1
- Low/Medium productivity = 2
- Moderate productivity = 3
- Medium High productivity = 4
- Most productive soils = 5

Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model data inputs

#8 Watershed Protection



USGS HUC 12 Watershed data.

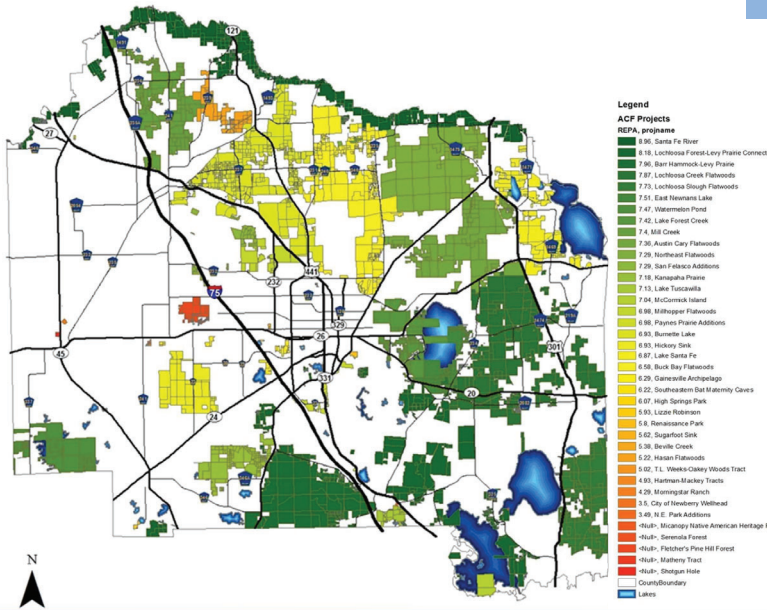
Surface water is a key consideration for floodplain protection and land conservation in important watersheds.

RANKS

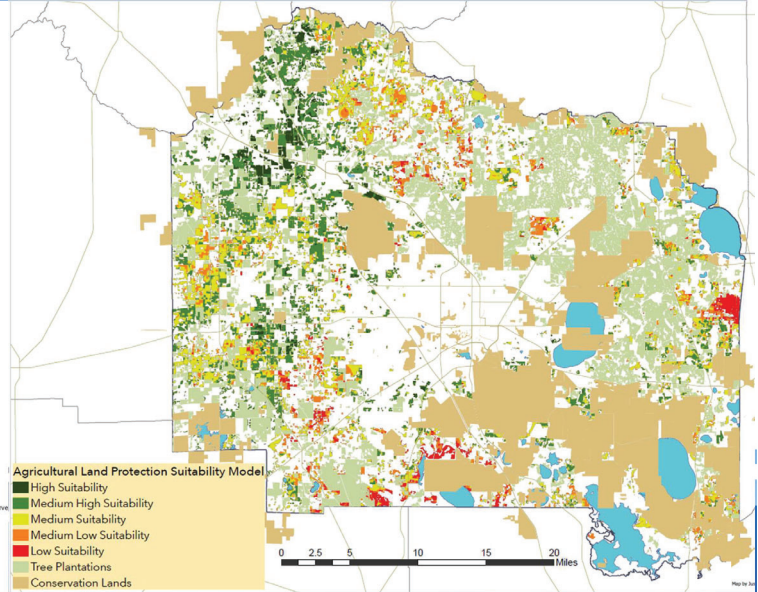
- Non-contributing Surface Water Area = 1
- Alachua Stream System & Etoniah Creek = 3
- Orange Creek Basin, Watermelon Pond, & Santa Fe River Watershed = 5

Identifying County-level geographic priorities

Original ACF Project Areas



Draft Agricultural Land Suitability Model (Inputs 1-8)



Identifying County-level geographic priorities

DRAFT Model Outputs

Dark Green = Most suitable for protection

Red = Less suitable for protection





DISCUSSION POINT

Geographic Model Data Inputs, Model Output and Use

33

Citizen Voice - Advisory Board or Subcommittee

TASK - Identify and recommend potential members and committee structure, and building a joint subcommittee from stakeholders:

1. LCB members
2. Rural Concerns Advisory Committee
3. Agricultural producers
4. Local Food Organization
5. IFAS Representatives
6. Diverse stakeholders representing county wide municipalities
7. Others?



DISCUSSION POINT

Advisory Board Constitution and Role

Stakeholder Outreach

- * Landowner Charette:11/28/23
- * Ongoing 1-on-1 Landowner Outreach



PRESENTATIONS

- Land Conservation Board : 4/25/24
- Environmental Protection Advisory Committee: 5/7/24
- Rural Concerns Committee: 5/21/24
- Board of County Commissioners Special Policy meetings: 12/5/23 & 6/4/24
- Rural Concerns Committee: 8/20/24

Stakeholder Feedback

- **Flexibility in Agricultural Land Uses**
- **Farm Transfer and Succession Planning** – Current Grant from American Farmland Trust
- **Payment for Ecosystem Services provided by their farms** – Future Target? - Partnering landowners with other funding sources?
- **Prioritization based on Soils and Economic impact of farm**

37



DISCUSSION POINT

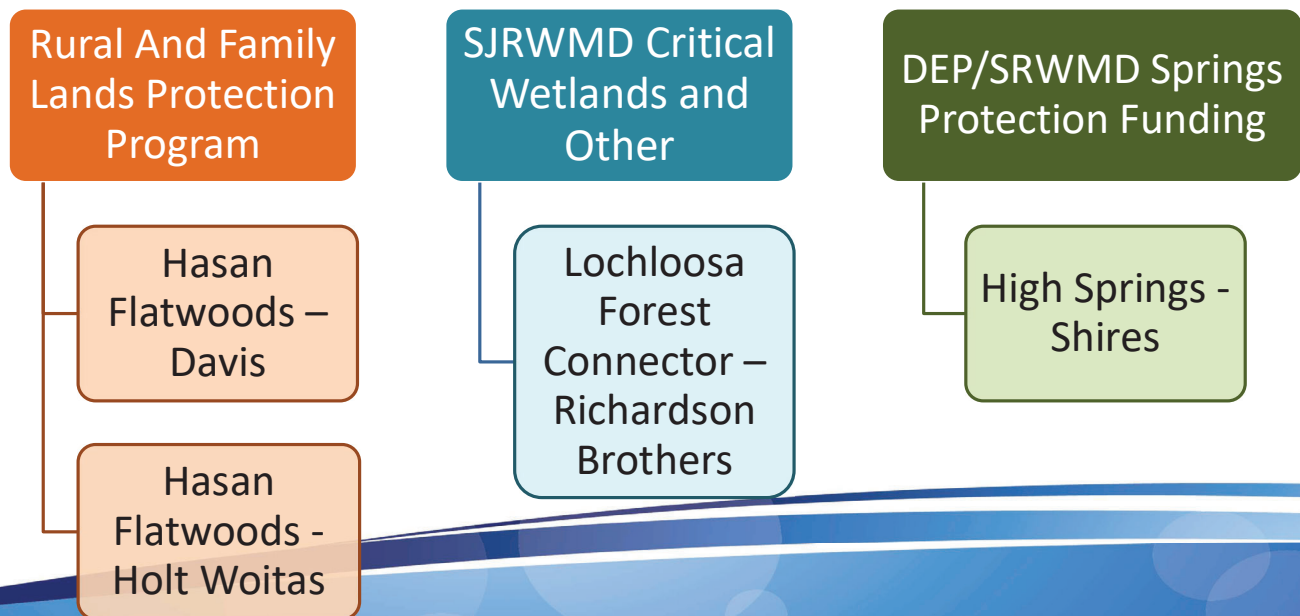
Outreach Strategy

38

Easement Funding Partners

Name	What does it fund	Application /Enrollment Period
ACEP ALE	50% CE Value	Typically end of calendar or beginning of calendar year either December or January
RCP	50% or 25% of CE Value	Periodic open enrollment periods depending on available funding and defined by lead partner
Springs Restoration funding & Alternate Water Supply	Acquisition costs typically 10% – 50% of CE value	Typically accept applications in December or each year. Funding awards are typically not announced until Fall or Winter the following year.
Florida Forever	Acquisition & due diligence	Varies depending on property status within or outside of a Florida Forever project area
Rural Family Lands Protection Program	25%-100% of CE Value & Due Diligence	Open enrollment periods. The last open enrollment was June 2023.

Partnerships identified for early implementation



Opportunities for Feedback

- Feedback on General Strategy Concept
- Feedback on Specifics of Strategy Development As Presented
 - Mission
 - Ranking Questions
 - Funding & Project Cost-Sharing
 - Crop Priorities
 - Geographic Priorities
 - Advisory Board Structure
 - Outreach
 - Other?

Types of Staff Recommendations to be presented to BOCC in August

- Mission & Ranking Adoption
- Minimum Easement Deed Requirements/Language
- Agricultural Land Strategy Easement Funding
 - Prioritization of a % of Land Acquisition Funding for Agricultural Easements
 - Requirements for Project Cost-Sharing from partners
- Advisory Board Structure
- Staffing/Equipment Needs



**QUESTIONS
OR
COMMENTS?**