



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 24-00774

Agenda Date: 8/27/2024

Agenda Item Name:

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

Presenter:

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Description:

Staff requests the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) approve the addition of the following land conservation project 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 (LCB) as outlined in Resolution 22-066.

1. Alachua County (Northeast Flatwoods, Buck Bay Flatwoods, Austin Cary Forest; Lake Santa Fe; Santa Fe River ACF Project Areas) – Rayonier (Full Price List)

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

Recommended Action:

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

1. Alachua County (Northeast Flatwoods, Buck Bay Flatwoods, Austin Cary Forest, Lake Santa Fe, and Santa Fe River ACF Project Areas) – Rayonier (Full Price List) - Parcels approved by the LCB and placed in the Priority Pool

Prior Board Motions:

None

Fiscal Note:

Alachua County (Northeast Flatwoods, Buck Bay Flatwoods, Austin Cary Forest, Lake Santa Fe, and Santa Fe River ACF Project Areas) – Rayonier (Fee Simple) - Cost Estimates:

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10-year stewardship (fee simple): \$22,707,087

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$79,077

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

Additional details can be found in Exhibits 3 and 4

Strategic Guide:

Environment

Background:

Alachua County – Rayonier: The majority of the parcels were originally nominated to the Alachua County Forever Program (ACF) in 2001 for consideration as a fee simple acquisition. The subject parcels were renominated in August 2024 by the North Florida Land Trust with the inclusion of any additional Rayonier parcels within Alachua County that were not a part of any of the 2001 nominations. The landowner granted permission for ACF staff to access the properties for a site visit, which was approved by the BoCC in the 8/13/2024 daytime meeting. On August 22, 2024, the Land Conservation Board (LCB) placed the 13,265± acre Alachua County – Rayonier properties in the Priority Pool. The Rayonier project includes 50 parcels under three Rayonier ownerships (see exhibit 1 for list of Alachua County Property Appraiser Tax Parcel Numbers (ACPA TPN)). The parcels are spread across northern Alachua County and fall within five different ACF project areas: Northeast Flatwoods, Buck Bay Flatwoods, Austin Cary Forest, Lake Santa Fe, and the Santa Fe River; and they also fall within five different Strategic Ecosystems: Buck Bay Flatwoods, Northeast Flatwoods, Saluda Swamp, Gum Root Swamp, and Santa Fe River. The parcels were divided into subprojects for evaluation based on their location, access, and future management considerations.

A key feature among the parcels that could potentially be acquired is a long corridor connecting the county's Buck Bay Flatwoods Preserve and the Murphree Wellfield Conservation Easement with the Austin Cary Teaching Forest and other public conservation lands within the Florida Wildlife Corridor in Alachua County. This creates a critical linkage between the conservation lands in this part of the County and serves as a potential secondary contributor to the O2O corridor and the Florida Wildlife Corridor footprint in Alachua County. As a larger subproject, the Wellfield – Austin Cary Connector encompasses approximately 9,696 acres between the City of Gainesville and Waldo. The property also includes a significant portion of the remaining portions of the Murphree Wellfield primary, secondary, and tertiary protection zones not yet in public ownership. While the Wellfield-Austin Cary subproject contains one of the more significant conservation lands corridor features, substantial ecological gains could also be achieved through the acquisition of all or portions of the remaining subprojects.

The uplands across all of the tracts are predominantly mesic flatwoods that are now managed as pine plantation. They are planted in a mixture of slash pine and loblolly pine, as well as some longleaf pine in areas of higher elevation with remnant sandhill qualities. The pine stands are of varying age classes, with a mixture of merchantable and pre-merchantable stand conditions. The pine plantations are bedded, but many of the stands retain moderately diverse understory species composition, while others retained lower diversity due to stand conditions and age. Smaller areas of remnant sandhill vegetation were observed on the Wellfield parcels of the Wellfield-Austin Cary connector subproject as well as the Little Hatchet Creek tract. Floodplain forest and wet flatwoods communities were also observed along the boundaries associated with wetlands and streams.

Wetland features include basin swamp, dome swamp, floodplain swamp, basin marsh and baygall occurring across the property. These wetland communities are generally in good to very good conditions with diverse overstory, midstory, and understory species. Portions of several blackwater streams also flow across several of the tracts, including Hatchet Creek, Little Hatchet Creek, Lochloosa Creek, Monteocha Creek, Bee Tree Creek, and associated tributaries.

Roads and gates are maintained in very good condition overall, and very little evidence of solid waste was observed onsite. Many of the tracts are used for recreational hunting under a lease agreement (presumably) and while there are hunt stands, deer feeder troughs, and hunt area markers across the site it is clear the properties are well-cared for and maintained. Non-native invasive species were observed at low to moderate distribution, primarily associated with the service roads on the property, creek flows and property boundaries.

Additional information can be found in the attached maps and evaluations. (Exhibits 1 and 2)