



Agenda Item Summary

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**File #: 24-00820**

**Agenda Date: 9/10/2024**

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**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 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. Watermelon Pond – Eichhorn (Full Price List)
2. Watermelon Pond – Hawkins (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 purchase or option contracts. 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. Watermelon Pond – Eichhorn (Full Price List)
2. Watermelon Pond – Hawkins (Full Price List)

**Prior Board Motions:**

None

**Fiscal Note:**

**Watermelon Pond – Eichhorn (Fee Simple) - Cost Estimates:**

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10-year stewardship (fee simple): \$153,165

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$65.34

**Watermelon Pond – Hawkins (Fee Simple) - Cost Estimates:**

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10-year stewardship: \$547,633

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$3,219.59

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

*Additional details can be found in Exhibits 5 and 6.*

## **Strategic Guide:**

Environment

### **Background:**

Watermelon Pond – Eichhorn: On July 03, 2024, Julia Eichhorn nominated the subject property to the Alachua County Forever Program (ACF) for consideration as a fee simple acquisition. The Eichhorn project includes one parcel (Alachua County Property Appraiser Tax Parcel Numbers (ACPA TPN) 02697-003-000) under one ownership. The property is in southwestern Alachua County, near the Gilchrest County boundary. On August 22, 2024, the Land Conservation Board (LCB) placed the 10.00-acre Watermelon Pond – Eichhorn property in the Priority Pool.

Although small, the Eichhorn property is adjacent to the Johnson property (ACPA TPN 02697-001-000) and the Moore-Purcell-Trammell property (ACPA TPN 02697-000-000) which were placed on the Active Acquisition List on August 13, 2024, and the Dumford and Palmer Property (ACPA TPN 02697-002-000) which was placed on the Active Acquisition list on June 25, 2024. Together these parcels form 138.5 contiguous acres, and they would be managed together should they be acquired.

The Eichhorn property is undeveloped and similar in character to the adjacent nominations. The onsite natural community is sandhill in good to fair condition with minimal human impact and wide range of species diversity. The overstory consists of mature, scattered longleaf pines, with blue jack, turkey oak, and sparkleberry comprising much of the mid-story. Wiregrass and other native species are common in the understory. Given the lack of prescribed fire history on the property, there are areas where successional hardwoods are starting to become dominant, but the parcel has retained many qualities of a sandhill natural community

*Additional information can be found in the attached evaluation. (Exhibit 1)*

Watermelon Pond – Hawkins: The Hawkins property was nominated by Gary Hawkins on July 19, 2024, for consideration as a fee simple acquisition. The 80-acre Hawkins property is two parcels (ACPA TPN 02711-000-000 and 02711-000-002) located in Southwestern Alachua County between Newberry & Bronson. The Southeast corner of the property has connectivity with parcels within the Watermelon Pond Preserve which is managed by Alachua County. On August 22, 2024, the LCB placed the Hawkins property in the Priority Pool.

Upland communities include sandhill, xeric hammock, sinkholes, planted pine, and successional hardwood hammocks. The west side of the property is predominantly former sandhill, in fair condition, with longleaf pine and turkey oak and patches of intact groundcover. Historic aerial imagery indicates the presence of hardwood hammock on the east side of the property, but the current hardwood community cover is far more extensive and has encroached into the former sandhill. The planted pine areas are mostly longleaf and some loblolly, some with an open understory of pasture grasses and some with a midstory of successional oaks and little groundcover. There are two improved pastures totaling approximately 8 acres to the north and west of the homestead.

The property contains 4.2 acres (approximately half) of an 8.6-acre marsh lake which crosses the northern boundary into an adjacent property. The marsh edge is populated with maidencane, meadowbeauties, and several species of St. John's Wort. A sandhill upland lake adjacent to the marsh has apparent connectivity to the aquifer, based on landowner accounts, but this was not verified by staff.

*Additional information can be found in the attached site evaluation. (Exhibit 3)*

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.”