



Agenda Item Summary

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**File #: 24-01030**

**Agenda Date: 12/10/2024**

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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. Mill Creek – McKnight (Bellamy Valley Ranch) (Full Price List)
2. Lake Santa Fe – PM Land Inc (Bargain Share 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. Mill Creek – McKnight (Bellamy Valley Ranch) (Full Price List)
2. Lake Santa Fe – PM Land Inc (Bargain Share List)

**Prior Board Motions:**

None

**Fiscal Note:**

**Mill Creek – McKnight (Bellamy Valley Ranch) (Conservation Easement) - Cost Estimates:**

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10-year stewardship (fee simple): \$1,433,027

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$12,732.37

**Lake Santa Fe – PM Land Inc (Fee Simple) - Cost Estimates:**

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10-year stewardship: \$809,280

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$6,981.01

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:**

**Mill Creek – McKnight (Bellamy Valley Ranch):** On July 24, 2024, Margaret McKnight nominated the subject property to the Alachua County Forever Program (ACF) for consideration as a conservation easement. The McKnight (Bellamy Valley Ranch) project includes three parcels (Alachua County Property Appraiser Tax Parcel Numbers (ACPA TPN) 03015-000-000, 03014-001-000, and 03014-010-006) under a couple of ownerships within the family. The property is in north-central Alachua County, north of the city of Alachua. On October 25, 2024, the Land Conservation Board (LCB) placed the ~283-acre Mill Creek – McKnight (Bellamy Valley Ranch) property in the Priority Pool.

Under the current family ownership, the McKnight property has primarily been used for hay production, cattle grazing, and timber production. Natural communities on the property include upland hardwood forest, seepage stream, blackwater stream sinkhole, in good to fair condition. The most outstanding natural feature on the property is the blackwater stream, Bad Dog Branch, one of the primary tributaries of Mill Creek, which flows into the Mill Creek Sink, less than two miles downstream from the McKnight property. Bad Dog Branch also flows through the Rembert Conservation Easement which is adjacent to the McKnight property to the east across CR 241. Dye trace studies (1976 and 2006) have shown that Mill Creek Sink is hydrologically connected to Hornsby Spring on the Santa Fe River. Acquisition of a Conservation Easement on this property would further protect the Mill Creek Sink stream to sink system and add a key piece of protection in the Springs Protection Zone in this area.

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

**Lake Santa Fe – PM Land Inc:** The PM Land Inc property was nominated by Craig Carter, representing the landowner, Jerry Painter, on August 13, 2024, for consideration as a fee simple acquisition. The ~28.5-acre property is two parcels (ACPA TPN 18762-000-000 and 18762-001-001) located in Northeastern Alachua County, west of Melrose on the South side of Lake Santa Fe. The property is adjacent to the Jill McGuire Santa Fe Lake Park that is managed by the Alachua County Parks and Open Space program. On October 25, 2024, the LCB placed the PM Land Inc. property in the Priority Pool as a bargain share project. At that time, the LCB recommended that if acquired, management of the property be assigned to the Alachua County Parks and Open Space Department or an entity other than the Alachua County Land Conservation Program.

The property primarily consists of successional hardwood forest, old field successional pine, improved pasture, and a roughly 0.25-mile-long canal that runs north-south down the western parcel. Although unaltered natural communities are not well-represented on the site, remnant native vegetation in the pasture areas, including several paw paw species, sandhill milkweed, carphophorus, and prickly pear, are indicative of potential site history as a sandhill or upland mixed woodland. Numerous gopher tortoise burrows were also observed in this area, and many were presumed to be active based on their condition. The property's adjacency to Jill McGuire Santa Fe Lake Park make it a potentially viable way to expand the park and provide more recreational opportunities to the public, including more access to the lake via the canal.

*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.”