



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 25-00069

Agenda Date: 1/14/2025

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. Lochloosa Creek Flatwoods – Lakes of Hawthorne LLC (Full Price List)
2. Watermelon Pond – DeCubellis (Full Price List)
3. Lochloosa Connector – Powell and Sandborn (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. Lochloosa Creek Flatwoods – Lakes of Hawthorne LLC (Full Price List)
2. Watermelon Pond – DeCubellis (Full Price List)
3. Lochloosa Connector – Powell and Sandborn (Full Price List)

Prior Board Motions:

None

Fiscal Note:

Lochloosa Creek Flatwoods – Lakes of Hawthorne, LLC (Fee Simple) - Cost Estimates:

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10-year stewardship: \$1,638,126

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$5,672.58

Watermelon Pond – DeCubellis (Conservation Easement) - Cost Estimates:

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10-year stewardship: \$880,000

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$5,672.58

Lochloosa Connector – Powell and Sandborn (Conservation Easement) - Cost Estimates:

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10-year stewardship: \$256,058

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$633.63

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

Additional details can be found in Exhibits 7 and 8.

Strategic Guide:

Environment

Background:

Lochloosa Creek Flatwoods – Lakes of Hawthorne, LLC: On October 16, 2024, Putnam Land Conservancy (PLC) nominated the subject property to the Alachua County Forever Program (ACF) with permission from the landowner, for consideration as a fee simple acquisition. The project includes three parcels (Alachua County Property Appraiser Tax Parcel Numbers (ACPA TPN) 19919-000-000, 19503-000-000, and 19952-000-000) under one ownership. It is part of a larger land conservation project initiated by PLC to establish a larger protected corridor between the Little Orange Creek Nature Preserve in Alachua County the Ocala to Osceola portion of the FL Wildlife Corridor. On December 05, 2024, the Land Conservation Board (LCB) placed the approximately 201-acre property in the Priority Pool.

The majority of the uplands on the site are improved pasture and successional hardwood forest, and the property has been used for grazing, timber, and potentially other agricultural practices over time. The natural communities that remain on the property are in good to fair condition and include classic upland lake (Little Orange Lake), floodplain marsh, mesic hammock, depression marsh, blackwater stream (Little Orange Creek) and bottomland forest. Much of the site was heavily infested with invasive plants, which could be costly and time consuming to manage. The site could be suitable to provide public access to the lake and other recreational opportunities.

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

Watermelon Pond – DeCubellis: On August 30, 2024, the DeCubellis' nominated their property to the ACF program for consideration as a conservation easement. The ~160-acre property is two parcels (ACPA TPN 02716-002-000 and 02716-000-000) located in Southwestern Alachua County, south of Newberry and west/ southwest of Archer, on the boundary with Levy County. The western boundary of the property is connected to parts of Watermelon Pond Preserve, and the property also forms a physical connection from the preserve to the Biro Conservation Easement, which is under contract to be acquired by the County. On December 05, 2024, the LCB placed the property in the Priority Pool.

The site is mostly upland, consisting mostly of semi-improved pasture intermixed with some remnant pine plantation and successional hardwoods. There are also two small depression marshes on the southern parcel, which are commonly used by a variety of birds. The property is currently used primarily for grazing, but it was historically harvested for timber – both sand pine and slash pine. Based on staff observations and landowner accounts, a variety of wildlife use the site, most notably, many species of reptiles, including gopher tortoises, and an abundance of bird species as well. The landowners are avid recreational birders who value the tranquility of the site and greatly enjoy the

abundance of wildlife they regularly see, and they would like to be able to continue to manage their property for agriculture and wildlife use.

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

Lochloosa Connector – Powell and Sandborn: The Powell and Sandborn property was nominated on November 18, 2024, for consideration as a conservation easement. The ~165.8-acre property is one parcel (ACPA TPN 18326-000-000) located in southern Alachua County, southeast of Micanopy. On December 05, 2024, the LCB placed the property in the Priority Pool. The property falls within the Orange Lake Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) Area and consists of 22% wetland acreage (36 acres), and 78% upland acreage (129 acres). It is currently utilized as grazing land by the Richardson Brothers farm.

The primary wetland feature on the property is a portion of Fish Prairie, an over 350-acre wetland extending to the north and hydrologically connected to the outstanding waters of Orange Lake. Fish Prairie generally consists of an outer band of wet prairie surrounding a large central basin swamp. The wetland habitat associated with Fish Prairie is in very good condition, with high grass, sedge and forb species diversity in the wet prairie and appropriate native tree diversity in the basin swamp habitat.

Uplands on the property are a mixture of grazed pasture and mesic hardwood hammock, which buffers the edge of Fish Prairie. Historic aerials dating back to 1938 indicate that the property has been cleared and utilized for agriculture since before that time. The landowners would like to continue grazing cattle and harvesting hay on the property into the future, while protecting the Fish Prairie wetland and buffer hardwood habitat.

Additional information can be found in the attached site evaluation. (Exhibit 5)

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, those accepted as fee-simple acquisitions, 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.”