



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 25-00177

Agenda Date: 3/11/2025

Agenda Item Name:

Watermelon Pond - Dumford Tract Option Contract to Purchase Real Property

Presenter:

Andi Christman, Environmental Program Manager – Environmental Protection Dept., (352) 264-6803

Description:

Staff Requests the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) approve and exercise the attached Option Contract to Purchase the 68.5-acre Watermelon Pond - Dumford property from Jill A. Dumford through the Alachua County Forever program.

The execution of this Contract to purchase Real Property, is the final BoCC action on the acquisition of this project.

Recommended Action:

1. Approve and authorize the Chair to exercise the option to purchase under the Watermelon Pond - Dumford Option Contract to purchase Real Property, subject to the County's rights to conduct due diligence inspections and notice Seller of Title Defects and Environmental Defects as set forth in the Contract; and
2. Delegate to the County Manager the authority to decide whether to accept or reject title exceptions (#5, #6, #7, #8, #9, #10 & #11) based on the County Manager's evaluation as to whether said title exceptions will substantially impair the County's proposed use of the property; and
3. Delegate to the County Manager the authority to decide whether to close the acquisition subject to title exceptions (#5, #6, #7, #8, #9, #10 & #11) based on the County Manager's evaluation as to whether said title exceptions will substantially impair the County's proposed use of the property; and
4. Authorize staff to execute additional documents as necessary to close the transaction; and
5. Approve the attached budget amendment authorizing the expenditure of funds for due diligence and associated closing costs.

Prior Board Motions:

On June 25, 2024, the BoCC placed Watermelon Pond – Dumford property on the Active Acquisition List (Full Price List).

On June 28, 2022, the BoCC adopted Resolution 22-66 amending the process for selecting and acquiring Environmentally Significant Lands purchased using Wild Spaces and Public Places local government infrastructure surtax proceeds. This authorizes the acquisition of lands through fee simple and less-than-fee means and provides the process for such.

Fiscal Note:

The attached Journal Entry requests \$721,886 to complete this acquisition (Exhibit 7).

WSPP – Land Acquisition (Capital Expense) = \$609,993 (+10% contingency)

Fund#: 140.41.4160.537.61.00 - 6194101 Watermelon Pond - Dumford &

Fund #: 021.41.4160.537.61.00 - 6184160 Watermelon Pond - Dumford

General Operating & Due Diligence (Operating Expense) = \$46,267 (+10% contingency)

Fund #: 140.41.4160.537.31.00 - 6184160

Please see Exhibits 6 (Budget Amendment) & 7 (Acquisition and Stewardship Costs) for additional details.

Strategic Guide:

Environment

Background:

Staff has negotiated the attached Watermelon Pond – Dumford Option Contract to Purchase Real Property (Option), Exhibit 1, and it was executed by the Manager on **March 7, 2025**. The Option requires transmittal of a signed Notice of Exercise of Option by the BoCC Chair, to the Sellers by **March 28, 2025**, the date the option period ends. (Exhibit 1)

During the Inspection Period, the County shall have 120 days after the BOCC exercises its Option to conduct all due diligence on the property. The County may exercise its rights to resolve any due diligence matters pursuant to the terms of the contract within those 120 days and to extend the closing date if necessary.

The Dumford property (ACPA Tax Parcel: 02697-002-000) totaling 68.5 acres is located in southwestern portion of Alachua County, 6.5 miles south of the City of Newberry and 7.6 miles west of the City of Archer. The Dumford & Palmer parcel is about 1,000 feet east of the Gilchrest / Alachua County boundary line, and the parcel is directly across County Road 337 to the west and ½ mile north of Goethe State Forest.

The Dumford tract is within the Alachua County Forever Watermelon Pond Project Area and 99% of the parcel falls within the Watermelon Pond Strategic Ecosystem.

There is one natural community type on the property: sandhill, in good condition. Sandhill is a globally imperiled natural community, with a limited footprint in Alachua County. In addition to extremely high species richness and diversity, the deep sandy soils provide important aquifer recharge, making the opportunity to protect and restore it extremely valuable. The Dumford and Palmer parcel has an overstory that consist of mature longleaf pine trees with natural regeneration occurring, with a wide range of species diversity in the mid-story and groundcover.

Minimal invasive species were observed during the Dumford site visit. The two mobile homes and

shed on-site will be removed by the landowner, prior to closing. Additional information can be found in the attached property evaluation. (Exhibit 3 & 4)

There are no Permitted Exceptions in the Dumford & Palmer Option Contract, but these non-standard Title Exceptions are noted: (#5, #6, #7, #8, #9, #10 & #11):

5. Easement for ingress and egress contained in warranty deed recorded May 25, 1978 in O.R. Book 1138, Page 495, and in easement recorded in O.R. Book 1138, Page 499, Public Records of Alachua County, Florida.

#6. Easement for ingress and egress contained in quit claim deed recorded May 25, 1978, under O.R. Book 1138, Page 496, Public Records of Alachua County, Florida.

7. Terms and conditions of the ingress and egress easement contained in instrument recorded in O.R. Book 1138, Page 497 and O.R. Book 1138, Page 498, Public Records of Alachua County Florida.

#8. Right of way easements contained in Grants of Easement recorded August 15, 1979 in O.R. Book 1227, Page 193, as affected by Road Maintenance Agreements recorded in O.R. Book 2092, Page 333, O.R. Book 2092, Page 335 and O.R. Book 2092, Page 337, together with terms and conditions contained in said Easement and Agreements, Public Records of Alachua County, Florida.

#9. Easement to Central Florida Electric Cooperative, Inc. recorded in O.R. Book 1170, Public Records of Alachua County, Florida.

#10. Rights of others in and to the use of roads crossing a portion of the Land.

#11. This policy does not insure title to any mobile home located on the Land insured herein.

Some of the title exceptions are expected to be deleted prior to closing based on additional title examination or the survey. (Exhibit 5)

Legal and functional access on the Dumford parcel is provided through its eastern road frontage along County Road SW 282nd Street.

A boundary survey and phase I environmental assessment are the next steps of due diligence that will be initiated after the Option is exercised by Alachua County. Closing transactions would occur once there has been a determination by the County Manager that there are no title, survey, or environmental defects. Historically, one or more mobile homes were located on the property. The mobile homes have been removed, but the following items that serviced the mobile homes may still be located on the property and will become the responsibility of the County to properly abandon and remove from the property: utility wires/poles; fencing; groundwater wells; septic tank/pipes; and concrete pads.

Comp Plan Reference:

Acquiring the Watermelon Pond – Dumford Tract fulfills multiple objectives endorsed within the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan. Specifically, 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.”