



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 25-00390

Agenda Date: 5/27/2025

Agenda Item Name:

County Management of Florida Forever Property Acquisitions in Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor

Presenter:

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Description:

Authorization for staff to negotiate a management lease agreement with Florida Department of Environmental Protection for Florida Forever land acquisitions in the Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor – Florida Forever Project Area.

Recommended Action:

- 1) Authorize staff to pursue a lease agreement with the state DEP for parcels in the Little Orange Creek Corridor Florida Forever Project Area proposed for acquisition by the state.
- 2) Direct staff to return to the Board with a negotiated lease agreement with DEP for any parcel/s acquired, for Board consideration for authorization and execution.

Prior Board Motions:

April 9, 2024 – The BOCC approved and authorized a Chair letter to Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Division of State Lands supporting management of conservation lands in proposed Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor, Florida Forever Project Area (Exhibit 1)

Fiscal Note:

There is no additional cost or guaranteed budget commitment for this board action. For any properties acquired through the Florida Forever Program, all land acquisition costs will be paid by State of Florida. If acquired, this Florida Forever Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor project area will save Alachua County the cost of acquisition for any of these properties. No County land management funds will be expended on properties outside of Alachua County. A final lease agreement for any acquired properties will be brought back to the Board for consideration, including anticipated land stewardship costs and fund sources, before any County land management responsibilities would be finalized.

Strategic Guide:

Environment

Background:

The Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor is a Florida Forever Project Area authorized in 2025 through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Division of State Lands.

The Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor project area includes 30 Alachua County tax parcels, 27 of which are already on the Alachua County Active Acquisition List (see Exhibit 2 in blue), and one parcel in Putnam County, adjacent to Little Orange Creek Preserve (see Exhibit 2 in purple). This corridor has been identified to build a corridor between Alachua County's 6,300 acre Lochloosa Slough Preserve, with the nearly 2,900 acre Little Orange Creek Nature Preserve, jointly owned by Alachua County, Alachua Conservation Trust, and the City of Hawthorne.

Establishment as a Florida Forever Project Area, qualifies the Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor properties for acquisition by the state with Florida Forever funding. However, when Florida Forever project areas are proposed, a land management commitment must be available for the project area parcels, from a federal, state or municipal partner.

On April 9, 2024, the BOCC authorized a Chair letter providing initial commitment for land stewardship support in this Florida Forever Project area, during the proposal phase for the creation of the Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor Florida Forever Project Area. That authorization required that 1) prior to any final commitment of county resources, staff would request Board authorization to pursue a lease agreement with the state DEP for each parcel proposed for acquisition by the state, and 2) would also return to the Board for approval for return to the Board with an agreement for and to execute a lease agreement with DEP for each parcel approved and acquired.

The state DEP- Division of State Lands has begun initial land acquisition steps on several properties within the Little Orange Creek Corridor, with assistance from Putnam Land Conservancy. Part of the state process is to confirm the land management commitment made during the project area proposal phase. Acquisition by the state of any properties within the Little Orange Creek Conservation Corridor Florida Forever project area will save Alachua County the cost of that land acquisition. County management of properties in the project area furthers the County's conservation objectives, using Florida Forever dollars rather than local funds for conservation land acquisition. Following negotiation of lease terms and if lease execution is approved by the BOCC, management of these parcels may be provided in a cost-effective manner in conjunction with other nearby lands that County and partner staff are already managing.

A final lease agreement for any acquired properties will be brought back to the Board for consideration, including anticipated land stewardship costs and fund sources, before any County land management responsibilities would be finalized. Alachua County has previously made a management commitment for a Florida Forever program conservation land acquisition, at Little Lake Santa Fe Preserve (Lake Santa Fe – Murphey property) (Exhibit 3), which facilitated state acquisition of that Florida Forever property. No County land management funds will be expended on properties outside of Alachua County.