



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 25-00730

Agenda Date: 9/9/2025

Agenda Item Name:

Approval of Lochloosa Slough Preserve 10-Year Management Plan

Presenter:

Ryan Kennelly, Senior Planner, and Andi Christman, Program Manager: Land Conservation Program, Environmental Protection Dept.

Description:

Request Board approval of the Lochloosa Slough Preserve 10-year Management Plan including establishment of Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Wildlife Management Area on a portion of the preserve.

Recommended Action:

- 1) Approve the Lochloosa Slough Preserve 10-year Management Plan (Exhibit 1); and
- 2) Approve and authorize the Chair to sign the attached Chair letter indicating willingness to establish a Wildlife Management Area in coordination with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, pending negotiation of agreement and terms (Exhibit 2).

Prior Board Motions:

On December 12, 2023, the BoCC approved and authorized the Chair to exercise the Lochloosa Slough – Jackson Heirs Option Contract to purchase Real Property including a motion that the Board is to be apprised of any changes to the historic homestead by email.

On December 5, 2023, the BoCC moved to direct staff to move forward with the development of a relationship with the Florida Wildlife Commission (FWC) on the Lochloosa Slough Property using our existing hunting business plan.

On March 28, 2023, the BoCC approved the exercise of the option to purchase real estate pursuant to the Lochloosa Slough Flatwoods - Colasante Option Contract.

On March 23, 2021, the BoCC approved and authorized the Chair to execute the Contract to purchase the Lochloosa Slough - Fox Pen Connector Tract; Authorize staff to use WSPP - Land Acquisition funds for the land management cost associated with this property over time.

On September 24, 2019, the BoCC approved and authorized the Chair to execute the Contract to purchase the Lochloosa Slough Flatwoods - Lochloosa Slough Tract.

On June 14, 2016, the BoCC adopted Resolution 2016-64 opposing permission of bear hunting and

prohibiting hunting of Florida Black Bear on County-owned lands.

On January 22, 2013, the BoCC adopted the Alachua County Hunting Business Plan and the associated principles, policies and directives that guide recreational hunting on Alachua County Forever (ACF)-managed lands.

On February 26, 2002, the BoCC adopted the guiding principles for the Alachua County Forever Program, including guidance on management plan development for county nature preserves.

Fiscal Note:

Initial improvement and stewardship costs related to habitat restoration, preserve security, wildfire prevention, and public recreational access from Wild Spaces and Public Places funding, are estimated at \$530,000 from Fund 021.41.4160.537.xx.xx, and Fund 140.41.4160.537.xx.xx, and an estimated \$20,000 in annual maintenance costs from the General Fund, 001.41.4160.537.xx.xx.

Breakdown of Projected Initial Improvement and Stewardship Costs:

\$115,000 Parking lots (5 planned in phases)

\$65,000 Fencing

\$15,000 Improve driveway connections

\$40,000 Kiosks, bike racks, benches, interpretive/wayfinding signs, and other trail infrastructure

\$30,000 Solid waste removal and damaged structure demolition (pending approval)

\$150,000 Firebreak, road, and trail stabilization projects

\$15,000 FY26 reforestation (longleaf pine plantings)

\$100,000 FY26 invasive plant management

Project 6214104 Land Management: Lochloosa Slough already exists for the maintenance of this preserve, funded from Wild Spaces Public Places funds and has the additional budget to cover this expense.

Strategic Guide:

Environment

Background:

Lochloosa Slough Preserve is located in southeastern Alachua County between the communities of Hawthorne and Island Grove. It is entirely east of US Hwy 301 and borders Putnam County to the east. In total, the preserve is 6,266.8 acres. The preserve was purchased through four separate acquisitions made from 2019 to 2024 using Wild Spaces Public Places surtax funds. Outstanding ecological features include nearly 200 individual wetlands totaling over 1,500 acres, 2.5 miles of Lochloosa Slough, twelve distinct natural communities, and several listed plant and animal species. The entire preserve is located within the Florida Wildlife Corridor, a statewide initiative to connect existing conservation lands with new acquisitions to limit habitat fragmentation, protect water resources, strengthen climate resiliency, and ensure access to future public recreation. This sizeable preserve provides ample space for both natural resource preservation and restoration, as well as quality recreational opportunities for public enjoyment.

The Alachua County Forever (ACF) mission statement is to acquire, improve and manage environmentally significant lands to protect water resources, wildlife habitats, and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation. For the County's nature preserves, to improve and manage means land stewardship; to restore and enhance the natural resources to preserve their ecological functions for future generations. It also means to provide and maintain functional and safe

infrastructure for public access, where suitable. The County manages preserves under the Commission-adopted principle of “No Net Loss of Conservation Value” established as Commission policy in 2002 as part of the guiding principles for the Alachua County Forever Program.

Land Conservation Program staff are responsible for the development of these management plans for ACF preserves. The management planning process was originally developed by the Land Conservation Stewardship Team (LCST) in 2003 and is based upon generally-used best practices. It was updated in 2014 to comply with Resolution 22-066 to incorporate the Land Conservation Board (LCB) into the review process.

All plans are also made available for public input and review as a part of the plan development process. For the Lochloosa Slough Preserve Management plan, ACF staff have engaged with the local community through three public workshops and a tour of the preserve itself, each of which offered opportunities for the public to make comments on the proposed plans. The first workshop was held on June 9, 2022 after the purchase of the Fox Pen Connector tract, to introduce the ACF Program to the community, share the staff’s initial vision for the preserve, and gauge community reaction to the acquisitions. A second workshop was held on April 15, 2025 to update interested parties on specifics of the recreational opportunities staff were considering onsite, including establishing a WMA with FWC and allowing for no-cost quota permit hunting on a portion of the preserve. A site visit was conducted on August 9, 2025 to familiarize the public with the natural communities and management practices of the preserve. A final public workshop was held on August 14, 2025 to share the fully drafted 10-year Management Plan and receive public comments and feedback on proposals for the site.

Three Business Plans have also been adopted to inform preserve management activities: a Timber Business Plan, a Cattle Grazing Business Plan, and a Hunting Business Plan. Business Plans supplement the Management Plans for some preserve activities or uses. For many of the County’s residents, hunting is a traditional form of recreation and means of obtaining food. It is enjoyed in many forms, and hunters value greatly their experiences in the outdoors. Hunting modes addressed in the Alachua County Hunting Business Plan include:

1. Management by FWC either as part of a Wildlife Management Area, or a Public Small Game Hunt Area (currently in place on two county-owned properties (Watermelon Pond WEA-Gladman Tract, and Newnan’s Lake Conservation Area-Hatchet Creek Tract, and proposed for Lochloosa Slough Preserve).
2. Multi-Year Hunting License Agreements, managed by Alachua County, with private individuals or a private group.
3. Limited-Hunt License Agreements, managed by Alachua County, with private individuals or a private group.
4. No Hunting.

The Lochloosa Slough Preserve Management Plan proposes recreational opportunities that include: multiple-use trail system for hikers, mountain bikes, and equestrian use, nature study, and establishment of a FWC Wildlife Management Area over a portion of the preserve to provide a management public hunting opportunity for a limited range of game species (deer, turkey, and small game), but which does not allow hunting of black bear. Public hunting on established Wildlife Management Areas is managed by the FWC. FWC provides enforcement of WMA rules on the WMA properties, while responsibility for other land management activities is retained by the landowner, in this case Alachua County. The proposed WMA rules have been drafted by County land conservation staff working with FWC public hunting Area Biologists (Exhibit 3).

The Board of County Commissioners is now presented with the management plan for consideration for adoption.