

Site Evaluation Update

Lochloosa Forest Connector - Les-Que Two

6/23/2023 & 6/24/2025

Parcel Number

18354-059-000

Acres

521.62

On June 23, 2023, & June 24th, 2025, Alachua County Forever staff re-visited the Les-Que Two property which was evaluated and subsequently added to the Active Acquisition List in 2006. The purpose of the visit was to verify that no substantial changes have occurred that would have negatively affected the resource from moving forward in the acquisition of the property.

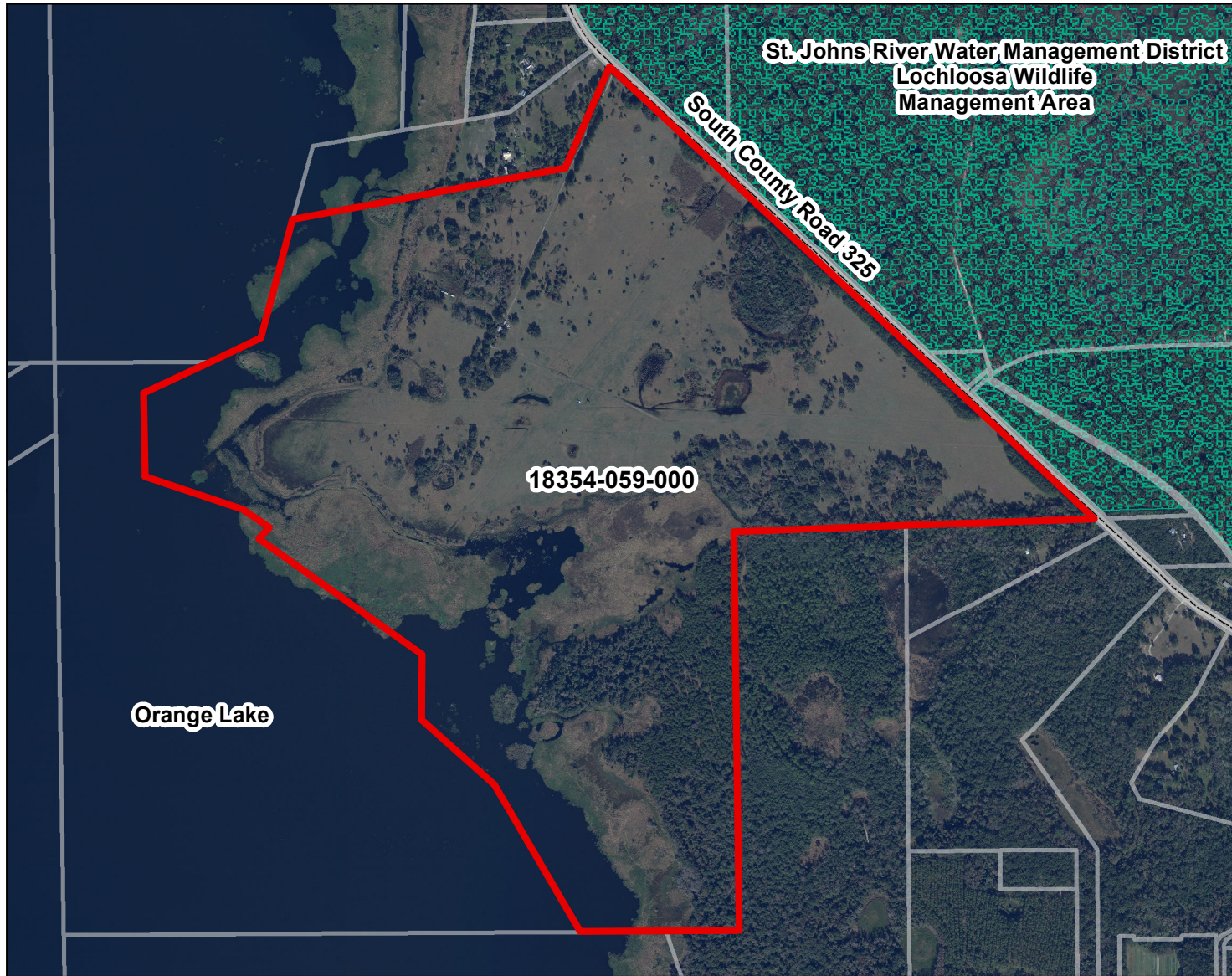
Between the two site-visits, staff observed a significant portion of the property: pasture area, Orange Lake edge, the roadside along County Road 325 and the wooded area along the southern portion of the parcel. Staff also observed, from afar, the two small residential structures and the associated storage sheds.

No change in the property's management had occurred since the 2006 site evaluation. A low density of cattle was still present within the pasture field, no active management of the upland mixed forest, xeric hammock or mesic flatwoods, and no expansion of the residential structures or sheds.

One thing staff noticed that wasn't mentioned previously is the presence of a one acre or less island on the northwestern portion of the parcel. The landowners indicated that this land mass was created by the State of Florida during a de-mucking project in Orange Lake that occurred between 2002 and 2004. The island also has a small tin roofed pole barn structure on it that air boaters use periodically.

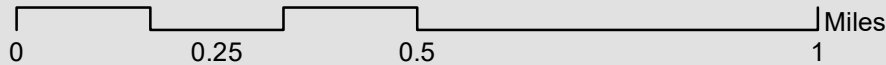
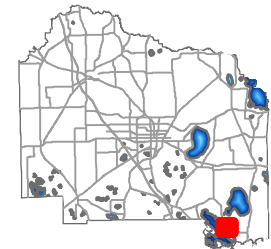
Staff conclusion is that the property is largely unchanged from its condition in 2006.

Lochloosa Forest Connector - Les-Que Two Parcel Map



Legend

- Les-Que Two Parcel (521.62 ac.)
- Conservation Land
- ACPA Parcels



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Lochloosa Forest – Levy Prairie Connector
Les-Que Two
4/07/06

Inspection Date: March 10, 2006
Parcel Numbers: 18354-059-000
Size: 521.62 acres
S-T-R: 1-12S-21E, 6-12S-22E, 12-12S-21E, 7-12S-22E
Buildings: Two houses and a shed
Just Value: \$373,900 or \$716.81 / acre
Total Value: \$419,700 or \$804.59 / acre
Project Score: 6.53 of 10
REPA Score: 8.18 of 9.44

Overall Description:

The 521.62 acre Les-Que Two property lies within the Lochloosa Forest-Levy Prairie Connector (LOC) project. It is located in the Cross Creek Area (Map 1) between Orange and Lochloosa Lakes on the east shore of Orange Lake near the southern end of the lake.

The Lochloosa Forest-Levy Prairie Connector (LOC) project was nominated by the Conservation Trust for Florida and scored 8.18 of 9.44 on the Rapid Ecological Project Assessment (REPA). It is the second-highest scoring project to date.

The property fronts Orange Lake and is a mixture of uplands and wetlands. Roughly 151 acres of the property (29 %) is basin marsh, which lies within Orange Lake. Approximately 2 miles of shore line divide the lake from uplands. Of the remaining upland area with scattered wetlands, approximately 282 acres (54% of the entire property, 76% of the uplands) are in improved pasture. The remaining 88.62 acres (17% of the entire property, 24% of the uplands) are used as rough pasture and includes mesic flatwoods, upland mixed forest, basin swamp and depression marshes. Recent land use also includes removal of merchantable timber from improved pasture, rough pasture (upland mixed forest, basin swamp, and flatwoods), and the construction of two unauthorized air strips. Cattle ranching is ongoing. Two small houses and one shed are present within the improved pasture portion of the property.

The property is within the Orange Creek Basin Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) plan. The SWIM designation calls for Water Management Districts to prioritize water bodies for protection and restoration, and to develop and implement plans and programs for the improvement and management of surface waters in cooperation with state and local governments.

Additionally the Les-Que Two property is within the Cross Creek Special Area Study. The purpose of this study is to establish general policies and development guidelines for future development in this area so that future land development is designed to place the environmental integrity of this area in the forefront of all development proposals.

Orange Lake is both an Outstanding Florida Water and on the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's list of impaired water bodies.

Natural Communities:

<u>Type</u>	<u>Quality</u>
Basin Marsh	Excellent
Upland Mixed Forest	Fair
Mesic Flatwoods	Poor
Depression Marsh	Fair- Poor
Basin Swamp	Good – Fair
Xeric Hammock	Good

Other

Improved Pasture/Berm
Low-impact development

Key Species:

The Les-Que Two property contains habitats that were deemed potentially significant for twenty-seven animal species as modeled by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), including bald eagles, a variety of wading birds, round-tailed muskrats, and black bear.

FWC 2002 data indicate two bald eagle nests within the property boundaries with a third very near the property boundary. Within a 1-mile radius of the property are five other records of nests. The registry also indicates that neither of the two nests on the property has been active since 2000. It appears that nearly all of the large pines once utilized by eagles have recently been cut down following the logging operation. Despite the absence of large pines historically used by bald eagles for nesting, two eagles were observed on the property during the evaluation, and a large sweetgum on the property is being utilized for nesting. The cluster of bald eagle nests around Orange, Newnan's, and Lochloosa Lakes has been apparent for the last twenty years and is one of the densest populations in the state of Florida, personal communication Steve Nesbitt, FWC.

Key Features:

According to Lidar data, a significant portion of the Les-Que Two property lies below the ordinary high water line that the State of Florida has established through legal proceedings. Based on Lidar data an estimated 193 acres of the 521 acres (37%) lies below the ordinary high water line and may therefore be subject to a Sovereign Submerged Lands claim. This is somewhat complicated by the presence of a berm that was constructed sometime prior to 1956. The berm has effectively isolated and dried area below the ordinary high water line, which is currently used as pasture.

The Les-Que Two property abuts both Orange Lake and Lochloosa Wildlife Conservation Area, though the latter is separated from the property by CR 325. It is also adjacent to the McLeod Silver Springs Grove property. Though the change in topography from Orange Lake to the uplands of the Les-QueTwo property is not large, the lack of vegetation structure in the improved pasture makes for scenic views of Orange Lake. It is part of the vegetated area surrounding Orange Lake that serves as a natural filter to trap nutrients and sediments prior to discharge into the lake.

Apart from the extensive cover of non-native pasture grasses in improved pasture and scattered cover in rough pasture, very few invasive exotics were observed on the property. The only invasive exotic plant observed, besides exotic pasture grasses, during the evaluation was tropical soda apple (*Solanum viarum*).

The condition of most of the natural communities on the property, with the exception of the basin marsh within Orange Lake, has been affected by a long history of grazing. Other impacts include ditches connecting many of the small (formerly) isolated depression marshes and the basin swamps. The construction of the air strips appears to have covered over portions of or entire small depression marshes (though none of these small wetlands were regulated wetlands). As part of the mitigation for constructing the unauthorized air strips the landowner was required to plant trees in the runways.

Management:

Management of the Les-Que Two property would involve restoration of selected areas with other uses on other portions of the property. Portions of the property within the floodplain of the lake, but upslope of the berm, could be restored relatively easily. Breach of the berm to restore a more natural hydrologic pattern and removal of grazing pressure will allow native vegetation to re-establish in those areas. Removal of cattle from upland mixed forest, various isolated wetlands and the remnant flatwoods would also benefit the condition of those communities. Flatwoods would require at a minimum re-planting an overstory of appropriate pine species and re-introduction of fire.

Options in the management of improved pasture include restoration, maintenance of the status quo through continued grazing or through mowing or conversion to pine plantation. Currently, restoration of the large acreages of improved pasture is not feasible. Costs associated with eradication of pasture grasses, reversing changes in soil chemistry, restoring hydrology and re-introduction of native vegetation are prohibitive at least on a large scale. In addition, techniques for restoration of pastures are not well developed. The other options, maintenance of the pasture via mowing or continued grazing or conversion to pine plantation are more feasible, and would likely be implemented in the short term.

Recreation:

The Les-Que Two property could be used for nature study or hiking trails, though the extensive coverage of improved pasture may be less attractive to recreational users than shady wooded areas. Scenic views of the lake and an undeveloped shoreline are attractive features for recreational users of both the lake and uplands.

Parcel Data:

The 2005 Alachua County Property Appraiser's (ACPA) just or land value for the property is \$373,900 or \$716.81 / acre. There are two small houses and one shed on the property. The total value is \$419,700 or \$804.59 / acre. These figures are for comparative purposes between nominated properties and are not necessarily an accurate reflection of the true cost of the property if acquired through the ACF program. At the time that the property was nominated (January 2006), the listing price of the property was \$9.12 million or \$17,500/acre.

The property is located within the Cross Creek Special Area Study. The purpose of this study is to establish general policies and development guidelines for future development in this area so that future land development is designed to place the environmental integrity of this area in the forefront of all development proposals.

Currently, this area is showing some development pressure associated with the town of Cross Creek. Within approximately one mile of this site there are numerous small residential parcels and rural large-lot subdivisions. The Les-Que Two property is zoned for Agricultural, Conservation and Single Family Residential with several land uses designations: Rural Agriculture, Exceptional Upland Habitat, Wetlands, and Active Use Zone. In the northern 102

acres that is zoned Agriculture, a gross density of 1 dwelling unit per 5-acres is possible with a maximum building impact area of one acre within areas of Exceptional Upland Habitat. Areas zoned Single Family Residential (approximately 185 acres of this parcel) can usually have a gross density of 1-4 dwelling units per acre, however, the land use on this property is 'Active Use Zone' and is in the Cross Creek Village Periphery area, which has a maximum residential density of one dwelling unit per five acres. The remaining 234 acres of the property are wetlands (some of which are subject to a Sovereign Submerged Lands Claim) and/or have a Conservation zoning. Based on the portion of the property not subject to a Sovereign Submerged Lands Claim and land use designation alone, without evaluating potential environmental constraints, the property could potentially be subdivided into approximately 90 units.

The natural features (flood prone area and wetlands associated with Orange Lake) appear to significantly constrain development potential for the western 220 acres of the property. Orange Lake has an Outstanding Florida Waters (OFW) designation, is zoned Conservation and County regulations require that an average buffer of 150 feet be maintained landward of the OFW. Based on Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC) 2002 data, there are several active bald eagle nests (AL020, AL063, AL006) on or very near the property. The parcel has direct access to CR 325.

Other:

There are no known sites recorded with the Florida Master Site File, Division of Historic Resources, Department of State on the Les-Que-Two property. However, the 1937 aerial photograph shows a structure in the location of the older of the two houses on the property. That house likely qualifies as an historic structure. Further, historic period archaeological sites associated with ranching are also likely present on the site.

Literature Cited:

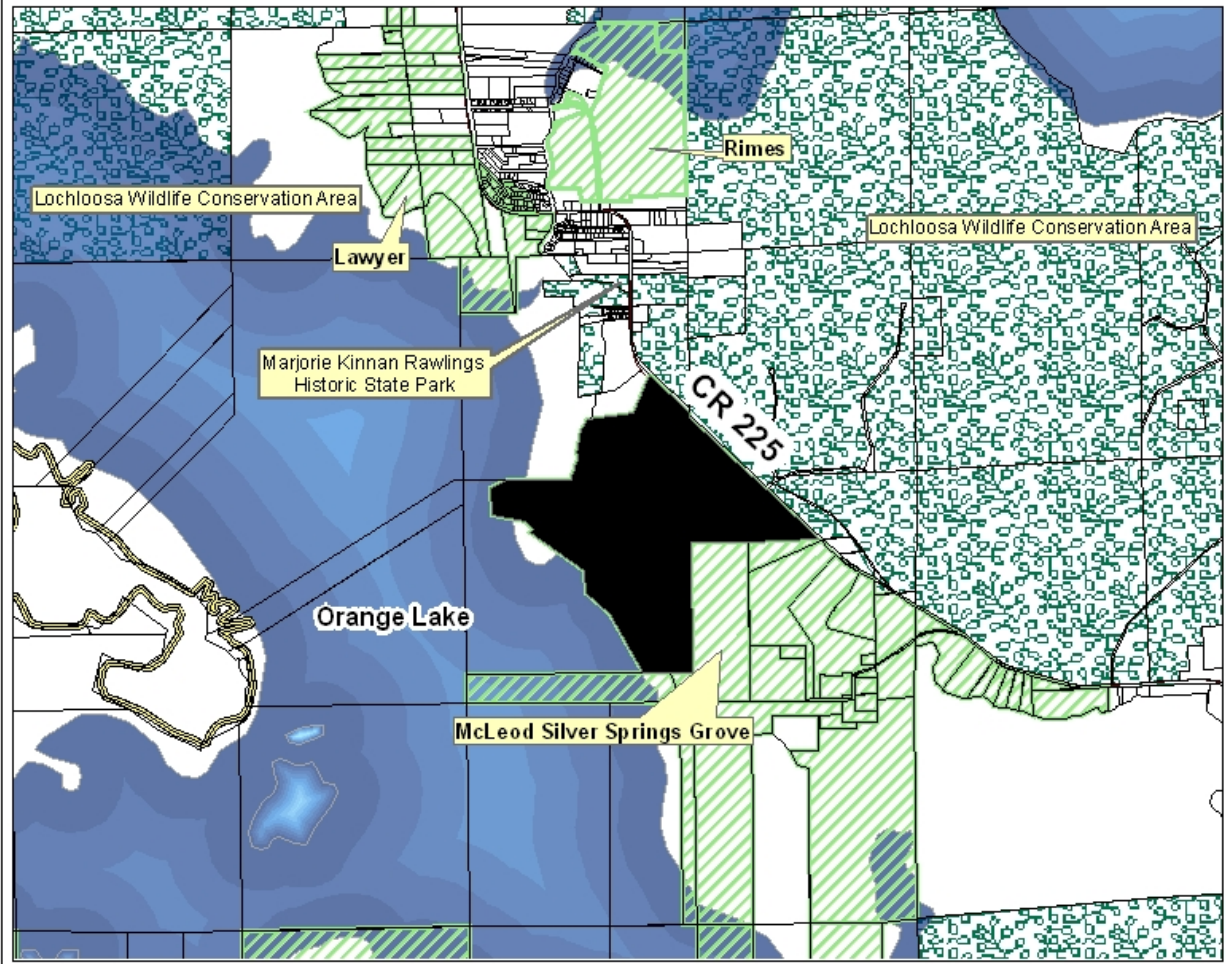
KBN, a Golder Associates Company. 1996. Alachua County Ecological Inventory Project. Prepared for Alachua County Department of Growth Management, Gainesville, Florida.

Alachua County Code, Chapter 394. Special Area Studies. Article II. Cross Creek. Pg.2816-2822.






Lochloosa Forest - Levy Prairie Connector - Les-Que Two		April 7, 2006			
CATEGORY	Criterion	WEIGHTING	Enter Criteria Value Based on Site Inspection	Average Criteria Score	Average Criteria Score Multiplied by Relative Importance
(I-1) PROTECTION OF WATER RESOURCES	A. Whether the property has geologic/hydrologic conditions that would easily enable contamination of vulnerable aquifers that have value as drinking water sources;		4		
	B. Whether the property serves an important groundwater recharge function;		3		
	C. Whether the property contains or has direct connections to lakes, creeks, rivers, springs, sinkholes, or wetlands for which conservation of the property will protect or improve surface water quality;		3		
	D. Whether the property serves an important flood management function.		3		
(I-2) PROTECTION OF NATURAL COMMUNITIES AND LANDSCAPES	A. Whether the property contains a diversity of natural communities;		3		
	B. Whether the natural communities present on the property are rare;		2		
	C. Whether there is ecological quality in the communities present on the property;		1		
	D. Whether the property is functionally connected to other natural communities;		5		
	E. Whether the property is adjacent to properties that are in public ownership or have other environmental protections such as conservation easements;		4		
	F. Whether the property is large enough to contribute substantially to conservation efforts;		5		
	G. Whether the property contains important, Florida-specific geologic features such as caves or springs;		2		
	H. Whether the property is relatively free from internal fragmentation from roads, power lines, and other features that create barriers and edge effects.		2		
(I-3) PROTECTION OF PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES	A. Whether the property serves as documented or potential habitat for rare, threatened, or endangered species or species of special concern;		5		
	B. Whether the property serves as documented or potential habitat for species with large home ranges;		4		
	C. Whether the property contains plants or animals that are endemic or near-endemic to Florida or Alachua County;		5		
	D. Whether the property serves as a special wildlife migration or aggregation site for activities such as breeding, roosting, colonial nesting, or over-wintering;		2		
	E. Whether the property offers high vegetation quality and species diversity;		2		
	F. Whether the property has low incidence of non-native invasive species.		2		
(I-4) SOCIAL AND HUMAN VALUES	A. Whether the property offers opportunities for compatible resource-based recreation, if appropriate;		3		
	B. Whether the property contributes to urban green space, provides a municipal defining greenbelt, provides scenic vistas, or has other value from an urban and regional planning perspective.		4		
	AVERAGE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND HUMAN VALUES			3.20	
	RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THIS CRITERIA SET IN THE OVERALL SCORE	1.333333			4.27
(II-1) MANAGEMENT ISSUES	A. Whether it will be practical to manage the property to protect its environmental, social and other values (examples include controlled burning, exotics removal, maintaining hydro-period, and so on);		2		
	B. Whether this management can be completed in a cost-effective manner.		2		
(II-2) ECONOMIC AND ACQUISITION ISSUES	A. Whether there is potential for purchasing the property with matching funds from municipal, state, federal, or private contributions;		4		
	B. Whether the overall resource values justifies the potential cost of acquisition;		5		
	C. Whether there is imminent threat of losing the environmental, social or other values of the property through development and/or lack of sufficient legislative protections (this requires analysis of current land use, zoning, owner intent, location and		4		
	AVERAGE FOR ACQUISITION AND MANAGEMENT VALUES			3.40	
	RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THIS CRITERIA SET IN THE OVERALL SCORE	0.666667			2.26
	TOTAL SCORE				6.53

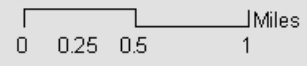
Lochloosa Forest – Levy Prairie Connector Les-Que Two

Map 1



Legend

-  Les-Que Two
-  Conservation Lands
-  Parcels
-  ACF Projects
-  County Boundary

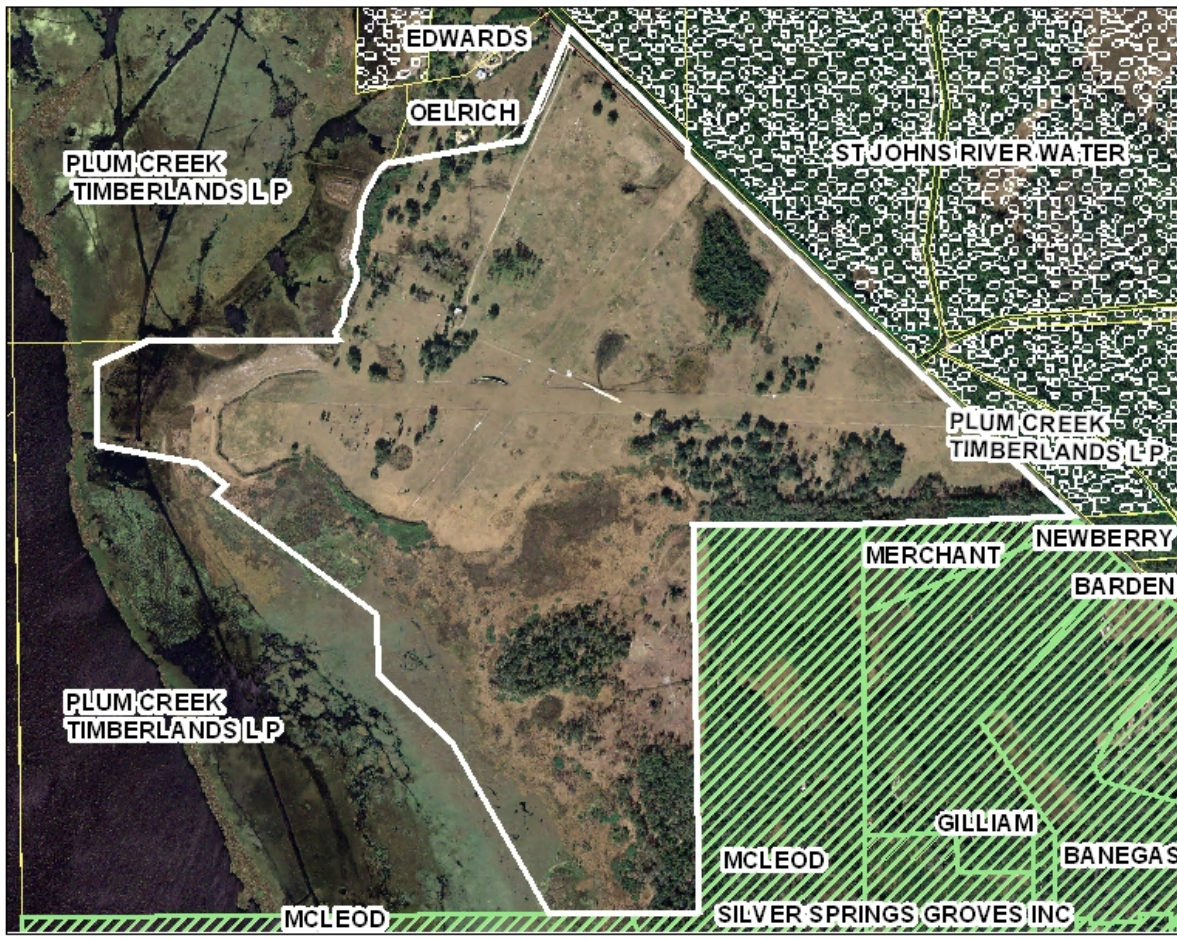


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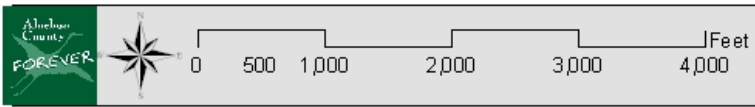
Lochloosa Forest – Levy Prairie Connector Les-Que Two

Map 2



Legend

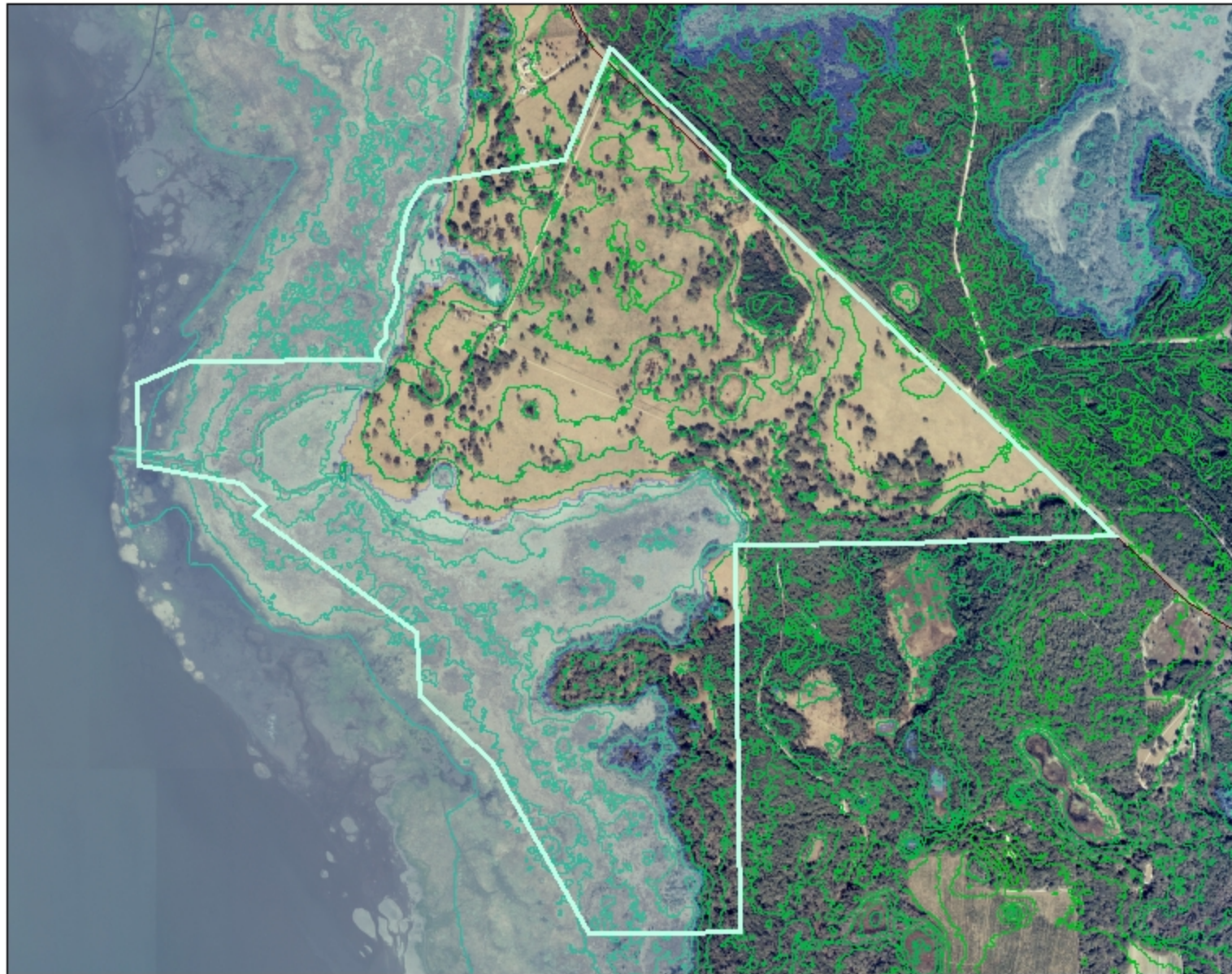
- Les-Que Two
- Parcels
- ACF Projects
- Conservation Lands



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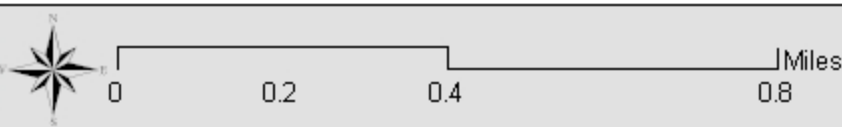
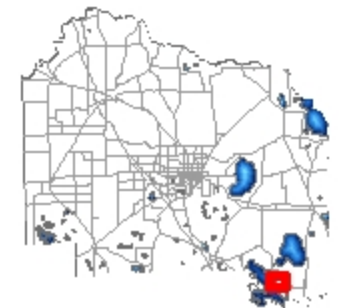
Lochloosa Forest – Levy Prairie Connector Les-Que Two



Potential Soverign Submerged Lands and Lidar Data

Legend

-  Les-Que Two
- Lochloosa Elevation**
 -  Less than or equal to 59.3 feet
- Orange Elevation**
 -  Less than or equal to 58.8 feet



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