



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 26-00301

Agenda Date: 4/28/2026

Agenda Item Name:

North American Wetlands Conservation Act Grant application – Partner Contribution Statement and Matching Contribution Plan Statement

Presenter:

Andi Christman, Land Conservation Program Manager, 352-264-6903

Description:

The Alachua County Forever Program is preparing an application for a North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). If awarded, this \$3 million grant will provide funding for the acquisition of conservation land to protect wetlands within Alachua County in the “North Florida Wetland Connector Conservation Project” footprint. This is a multi-phase project reimbursing acquisition dollars expended by the County as a component of the grant. Staff requests the Board authorize the Chair to sign the attached Partner Contribution Statement and Matching Contribution Plan Statements, which are required components of the grant application, and quantify the specific County acquisition projects which are submitted for funding consideration.

Recommended Action:

Approve and Authorize the Chair to sign the attached: 1) Partner Contribution Statement; and 2) Matching Contribution Plan Statement for Alachua County’s 2026 North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant application.

Prior Board Motions:

On May 26, 2020, the Board authorized the County Manager or her designee to sign and submit the 2020 partner contribution letters for Alachua Conservation Trust’s federal grant applications for RCPP and NAWCA (Phase 1).

On August 24, 2021, the Board authorized the Chair to sign a revised Partner Contribution statement letter for Alachua Conservation Trust’s July 2021 NAWCA (Phase 2) grant application.

On December 14, 2021, the Board authorized the County Manager or her designee to approve changes to the Partner Contribution Forms when a reduction in funds is requested to efficiently adjust applications as the need arises.

On June 28, 2022, the Board authorized the Chair to sign the Partner Contribution Statement for Alachua Conservation Trust’s NAWCA (Phase 3) grant application for the Lochloosa Creek Flatwoods – Brown tract.

On July 8, 2025, the Board authorized the Chair to sign the Partner Contribution Statement for Alachua Conservation Trust's NAWCA (Phase 5) grant application for the Lochloosa Connector – Les-Que Two tract (this project was not funded due to size).

On January 27, 2026, the Board approved and authorized the Chair to exercise the Lochloosa Connector – Les-Que Two 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.

On February 26, 2002, the BOCC placed the Barr Hammock – Webb property (formerly Pitts and Rudnianyn) on the Active Acquisition List (environmentally significant lands category).

On March 24, 2026, the BOCC placed the Barr Hammock – Ramsey property on the Active Acquisition List (environmentally significant lands easement category and agricultural easement category) and added the Barr Hammock – Webb property to the agricultural easement category.

Fiscal Note:

If the grant is awarded to Alachua County, then the purchase of conservation easements on the Barr Hammock – Webb and Barr Hammock – Ramsey properties can go forward. If the grant is not received, the approved Lochloosa Connector- Les-Que Two property will still be purchased.

The attached NAWCA Partner Contribution Statement states that the County will contribute an estimated \$5,400,000 in total for the fee-simple purchase of the Cow Hammock (Lochloosa Connector – Les-Que Two) property, which includes land, appraisals, due diligence, and other acquisition costs. These expenditures were approved by the Board on 1/27/2026. In addition, a portion of the county acquisition costs (\$395,000) associated with the Santa Fe River – Bell acquisition, which the County acquired on January 31, 2023, are also included in the Partner Contribution Statement. These expenditures will be used as “new” matching funds under the grant.

The attached NAWCA Partner Contribution Statement also states that the County will contribute a minimum net total of \$2,000,000 for the purchase of conservation easements on the Barr Hammock – Webb and Barr Hammock – Ramsey properties. This is in excess of the requested \$3 million NAWCA grant award. Prior to any expenditures on either of these properties not normally authorized under BoCC Resolution 22-066, the NAWCA grant (or other partner funding) must be awarded, and the properties must also be presented to the Board at a future meeting for consideration for the property option contract, and expenditures. The Board may authorize the expenditure through exercise of Option Contract for the properties.

The attached Matching Contribution Plan Statement states that \$3,495,300 of previously expended funds will be counted as matching funds toward the grant application. No new funds are being expended for the Matching Contribution Plan.

If awarded, the NAWCA grant could provide an estimated \$3,000,000 in land acquisition reimbursement funding to leverage the Alachua County Forever program's land conservation acquisition funds and extend funding resources to cover additional projects.

Sufficient budget exists in the Wild Spaces Public Places Land Allocation for these costs.
Project 6184160- WSPP-General Operating & Due Diligence: 140.41.4160.537.31.00
Project 6194101-WSPP-Land Acquisition: 140.41.4160.537.61.00; 140.41.4160.537.68.00

Strategic Guide:

Environment and Conservation

Background:

The Alachua County Forever Program is preparing an application for a North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant which awards funds through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to protect wetland habitat. This grant requires applicants to demonstrate matching funds have been or will be expended in support of the grant application, at least equal to the amount of the grant application. This NAWCA grant application includes identified wetland areas in Alachua County to be acquired and used as new grant match, specifically the Cow Hammock (Lochloosa Connector–Les-Que Two) property fee simple acquisition (est. 520 acres), the Santa Fe River – Bell property (acquired on 1/31/2023), and the Barr Hammock – Webb property Conservation Easement, and the Barr Hammock – Ramsey property Conservation Easement. If approved, the grant would reimburse the County for up to an estimated \$3 million in acquisition costs for the project. Applications for the current NAWCA grant cycle are due May 7, 2026.

This grant application requires evidence that Alachua County is an entity that is already committed to the conservation of land and water resources within the NAWCA grant region and that the grant awards will complement those existing conservation efforts in the same region. The Alachua County: Cow Hammock (Lochloosa Connector – Les-Que Two) property, Barr Hammock – Webb property, and Barr Hammock – Ramsey property acquisition projects would satisfy this requirement. The Matching Contribution Plan Statement and the Partner Contribution Statement are required components of the grant application.

In 2019, a NAWCA Matching Contribution Plan was established, allowing County funds expended on the previous acquisition of the Lochloosa Slough Flatwoods – Lochloosa Slough property to be counted as grant matching funds towards future NAWCA grant applications for up to five years. \$3,495,000 from the Matching Contribution Plan’s old match are still available to be counted toward this grant application (though these dollars were spent in 2019) and will be used in this application.

Alachua County has already benefitted from previous NAWCA grant applications (submitted by Alachua Conservation Trust on the County’s behalf), most recently with the receipt of a \$2 million reimbursement or land acquisition costs previously expended for the Lochloosa Slough – Fox Pen Connector land.

Comp Plan Reference: Alachua County Comprehensive Plan (2019-2040):

•Conservation and Open Space Element: 6.0 LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAM;

Objective 6.4 “Other Acquisition Programs,” states:

“Coordinate with other programs for the acquisition and management of natural areas and open space for recreational, open space and conservation purposes.”

Policy 6.4.1 states:

“The County shall seek to maximize the effectiveness of local revenue sources by using them to leverage funds available from federal, state, municipal, private non-profit, and Water Management District programs, such as Florida Forever, Florida Communities Trust (FCT), Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL), and Save-Our-Rivers (SOR).”

Policy 6.4.2 states:

“The County shall provide support, in the form of information, coordination, assistance in obtaining

grants, and other support activities to organizations and agencies that acquire and protect natural areas and open space for conservation, open space, and recreational purposes.”