



## Agenda Item Summary

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**File #: 23-00079**

**Agenda Date: 5/23/2023**

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**Agenda Item Name:**

**Addition of Land Conservation Projects to the Alachua County Forever Active Acquisition List**

**Presenter:**

Emily Uhlmann, Senior Planner – Environmental Protection Department, 352-275-2050

**Description:**

Staff requests the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) approve the addition of the following land conservation projects to the Alachua County Forever Active Acquisition List. The staff recommendation is based on the addition of these properties to the Priority Pool by the Land Conservation Board as outlined in Resolution 22-066.

- 1) Lochloosa Slough Flatwoods – Foust (Full Price)
- 2) Lochloosa Forest- Levy Prairie Connector – Richardson Brothers Inc. (Full Price, Conservation Easement)

Addition of these projects to the Active Acquisition List, authorizes staff to: obtain title work and appraisals, negotiate price and terms with the owners, and execute option contracts. Any option contract will be brought back to the Board for consideration.

**Recommended Action:**

Approve the addition of the following properties on the Active Acquisition List.

1. Lochloosa Slough Flatwoods – Foust (Full Price List)
2. Lochloosa Forest- Levy Prairie Connector – Richardson Brothers Inc. (Conservation Easement, Full Price List)

**Prior Board Motions:**

None

**Fiscal Note:**

**Lochloosa Slough Flatwoods – Foust (Fee Simple) - Cost Estimates:**

- Alachua County Property Appraiser (ACPA) Value & Acquisition Due Diligence: \$51,200
  - Due Diligence: title work, appraisal, survey, environmental assessment
- Stewardship, initial 10 years: \$85,316

Total estimated cost for acquisition and stewardship: \$136,516

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$547.49

**Lochloosa Connector – Richardson Brothers Inc. (Conservation Easement) - Cost Estimates:**

- ACPA Value & Acquisition Due Diligence: \$77,200
  - Due Diligence: title work, appraisal, survey, environmental assessment, baseline documentation report
- Stewardship, initial 10 years: \$5,500

Total estimated cost for acquisition and 10-year stewardship: \$82,700

The current annual property tax revenue of all the project parcels is: \$697.84

Section 196.26(3) F.S. states, “Land that is dedicated in perpetuity for conservation purposes and that is used for allowed commercial uses is exempt from ad valorem taxation to the extent of 50 percent of the assessed value of the land.”

County would only purchase development rights, so acquisition costs would be much less than stated above (excluding remaining land rights and all site improvements).

Estimated stewardship costs for the initial 10 years for both properties total: \$219,216.

Sufficient budget exists in the Wild Spaces Public Places Land Allocation for these costs.

Project 6184160- WSPP-General Operating & Due Diligence: 021.41.4160.537.31.00

Project 6194101-WSPP-Land Acquisition: 021.41.4160.537.61.00

If the WSPP Surtax budget in Fund 021 is exhausted if/when either of these parcels are brought to the Board for acquisition, they will be funded from the new surtax (beginning 1/1/23) with budget in Fund 140.

(Exhibit 5)

**Strategic Guide:**

Environment

**Background:**

Lochloosa Slough Flatwoods – Foust: On March 09, 2023, the Virginia Foust nominated the subject property to the Alachua County Forever Program. On April 27, 2023, the Land Conservation Board placed the 52.26-acre Lochloosa Slough Flatwoods – Foust property in the Priority Pool as an acquisition project.

The Foust project includes one parcel (20062-001-001) located south of Hawthorne along SE 162 Ave. It is bordered to the west and east by Lochloosa Slough Preserve. The entire property lies within the East Lochloosa Forest Strategic Ecosystem. If acquired, this property would provide a physical connection between the main portion of the Lochloosa Slough Preserve and the currently isolated parcels to the west.

The majority of the uplands on the property are mesic flatwoods in good to fair condition. All of the flatwoods were clearcut in 2019 and then subsequently burned by the Florida Forest Service in 2020. The site has not been replanted in pines, but loblolly pines are naturally reestablishing in the area. Understory vegetation consists primarily of gallberry, saw palmetto, blueberry and huckleberry species and bluestem grasses, but other notable native species found on drier parts of the property include wiregrass, Indian plantain, and giant orchids.

Wetlands on the property include a flatwoods lake, baygall, dome swamp, and basin swamp. The largest of these is the flatwoods lake in the southeast part of the property. The lake is in good condition with the waterlilies and Carolina redroot thriving in the open water portions of the lake. The basin and

dome swamps are also in good condition and are densely vegetated and contain a diversity of hardwoods.

Invasive plants were only observed in very low numbers across the site, and several gopher tortoise burrows were observed in the uplands. There is a mobile home on site which is currently occupied by the landowner. Should the property be sold to the County, the mobile home and associated storage containers would be removed from the site.

Additional information can be found in the attached property evaluation.

(Exhibits 1 & 2)

Lochloosa Forest- Levy Prairie Connector – Richardson Brothers Inc.: On March 10, 2023, Richardson Brothers Inc., nominated the subject property to the Alachua County Forever Program for consideration as a Conservation Easement. On April 27, 2023, the Land Conservation Board placed the 605-acre Lochloosa Connector – Richardson Brothers Inc. property in the Priority Pool.

The Richardson Brothers Inc. project includes three parcels (18354-030-000, 18354-031-000, and 18354-069-001). The property is located in southeast Alachua County along the border with Marion County. In addition to the parcels nominated in Alachua County, the family owns over 500 acres of adjacent property in Marion County as well as one other disconnected family parcel in Alachua County (18326-000-000) that they are interested in exploring easement options for. The scoring for this property only takes into account the three Alachua County parcels that were nominated on Orange Lake, but there is potential for a much larger cross-county easement project if partner support and funding can be leveraged.

Ecologically, the most significant feature of the property is the nearly two miles of frontage on the northwestern bank of Orange Lake, which is designated as an Outstanding Florida Water. Over 80% of the property is classified as wetland, the majority of which lies within the lake or encompasses wetlands associated with the lakeshore. Staff observed at least 29 bird species during the site visit, many of which were wading and wetland-associated species utilizing the lake edge and marshy areas bordering the lake. These observations included three imperiled species - a limpkin, a snail kite, and several bald eagles. There is at least one bald eagle nest on the property, and there are four other documented nests within one mile.

The majority of the uplands on the property are either grazed pasture or are used for hay. The landowners would like to continue these agricultural practices on the property into the future, and possibly pursuing other agricultural uses in certain areas. Their desire is not to sell the property outright, but to support their family business and protect the property for agricultural use into the future.

Additional information can be found in the attached property evaluation.

(Exhibit 3 & 4)

#### General:

The staff recommendation is based on the addition of these properties to the Priority Pool by the Land Conservation Board as outlined in Resolution 22-066.

As with all our conservation lands, if accepted as an acquisition, this property will go through the vetting process for the Registry of Protected Places.

#### Comp Plan Reference:

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.”