Green Swamp-Hilochee Corridor

Lake and Polk Counties

Partnerships

Purpose for State Acquisition

The primary purposes for the acquisition of the Green Swamp-Hilochee Corridor Florida Forever project are protection of the water supply of central Florida, particularly recharge for the Floridan Aquifer; protection of several rivers; preservation of a large area for wildlife; and provision of areas for public recreation.

Managers

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) will be the primary manager for the majority of this project since it is contiguous with Hilochee Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Recreation and Parks (FDEP/DRP) will be the primary manager for the portion of the project that is within the optimum boundary of Lake Louisa State Park. (See Acquisition Planning section for managers of land already acquired within the boundary.)

General Description

The project is 91,455 (GIS) acres, composed of 15 distinct natural communities and other community types. They include scrub, sandhill, and pine flatwoods, which are natural communities underrepresented in state conservation holdings. About 64% of the project area is in natural condition, while 36% is disturbed (ruderal, improved pasture and a very small amount of pine plantation.)

Green Swamp - Hilochee Corridor
FNAI Elements

Florida scrub-jay	G2/S2
Eastern Indigo Snake	G3/S3
Florida Mouse	G3/S3
Gopher Tortoise	G3/S3
Bald Eagle	G5/S3
Giant Orchid	G2G3/S2
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2T3/S2S3
Cutthroat Grass	G3/S3
Florida bonamia	G3/S3
Scrub Buckwheat	G4T3/S3
Florida long-tailed weasel	G5T3/S3
Sherman's fox squirrel	G5T3/S3

14 rare species are associated with the project

Geographically, the project is located within an Area of Critical State Concern and between Clermont and Haines City. It is also a short distance from the developed areas of Lakeland, Davenport, Lake Alfred, and the Disney World complex. Interstate 4 crosses the southernmost quarter of the project from east to west. US 27 runs north to south and generally defines the project's western border.

Hydrologically and geologically, the project is split north to south into two major drainage basins. The western basin drains north and west to the Withlacoochee River, and the eastern basin drains north and east into the Palatlakaha River and ultimately into the St. Johns River. Yet another sliver of the project area joins the drainage basin that meets the Kissimmee River drainage to the east and south. For the most part, elevations range between 120 and 175 feet above mean sea level (MSL). The marshes and swamps are generally lower than 120 feet MSL.

Biologically, five rare plants are documented as occurring within the project boundary. Ten rare animal species are documented on site (see FNAI Elements). From an urban planning perspective, the project has a moderate potential for being developed, subdivided or losing significant natural attributes or open spaces. The potential for development and loss of open space is highest on the uplands adjacent to the US 27 corridor on the Lake Wales Ridge.

Public Use

The FWCC will consider programs providing multiple fish/wildlife-based public recreational uses when land within this project is acquired. These potential public outdoor fish/wildlife-based recreational uses

Placed on List	**2012**
Project Area (GIS Acres)	**91,455**
Acres Acquired (GIS)	**35,561**
at a Cost of	**$59,466,086***
Acres Remaining (GIS)	**55,894**

w/Estimated (Tax Assessed) Value of $157,658,238**

***Includes acreage acquired and funds expended by the SWFWMD and SJRWMD. **Based on project Just Value, 2010.**

will enhance the public's understanding of the region while providing public outdoor recreational enjoyment. Essential roads will be maintained to provide all-weather public access and management operations; and unnecessary roads, fire lanes, and hydrological disturbances will be abandoned or restored as practical. Infrastructure development will be appropriate to allow public access and to provide facilities, security, and management of the property. Archaeological and historic sites will be managed in coordination with the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources (DHR). The DRP will consider expansion of existing recreational programs offered in the approved unit management plan.

Acquisition Planning

At the 6/10/2011 meeting, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) approved the reevaluation and redesign of the 233,598-acre Green Swamp Florida Forever project (added to the list in 1992), removing from the boundary about 14,448 acres of land that was either developed or otherwise unmanageable, then dividing the remaining acreage into four projects. At the 10/14/2011 meeting, the ARC approved the resource evaluations and eight management prospectuses for the four Green Swamp projects. The Green Swamp-Hilochee Corridor project is the easternmost of the four. Covering 91,455 GIS acres in northern Polk and southern Lake Counties, the project includes 5,138 parcels with multiple owners. About 39% of the lands within its boundary (36,000 acres) has been acquired for conservation.

Included within the boundary are all or part of the following managed conservation lands acquired in fee-simple: Hilochee WMA (FWCC); Lake Louisa State Park (FDEP/DRP); Lake Bonnet Marsh and Lake Lowrey Marsh (Polk County); Appleton and Gurov, Alice Lockmiller, and Green Swamp Parcels (SWFWMD); and Boggy Marsh Sanctuary (Florida Audubon Society). All or part of the lands within the boundary acquired using alternatives to fee-simple are as follows: Green Swamp Land Authority (GSLA) Land Protection Agreements; Green Swamp Conservation Easements; and Jahna Ranch Conservation Easement (FDEP/ Division of Water Resource Management, Bureau of Mining and Minerals Regulation).

Coordination

The GSLA worked with the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) in acquiring lands within the boundary. In 1999, the GSLA's responsibilities passed to the FDEP.

Management Policy Statement

Plans are to manage the Green Swamp-Hilochee Corridor to accomplish the following: conserve and protect lands within areas of critical state concern; conserve and protect significant habitat for native species or endangered or threatened species; provide areas, including recreational trails, for natural, resource-based recreation; and conserve, protect, manage, or restore important ecosystems, landscapes and forests in a manner that enhances or protects significant surface water, coastal, recreational, timber, fish or wildlife resources which local or state regulatory programs cannot adequately protect.

The portion of the Green Swamp-Hilochee Corridor project that lies within the optimum boundary of Lake Louisa State Park will be managed consistent with the goals and objectives in the approved Unit Management Plan. General management recommendations are restoration and enhancement of natural systems, maintenance of water quality, and public resource-based recreational use and resource education and interpretation.

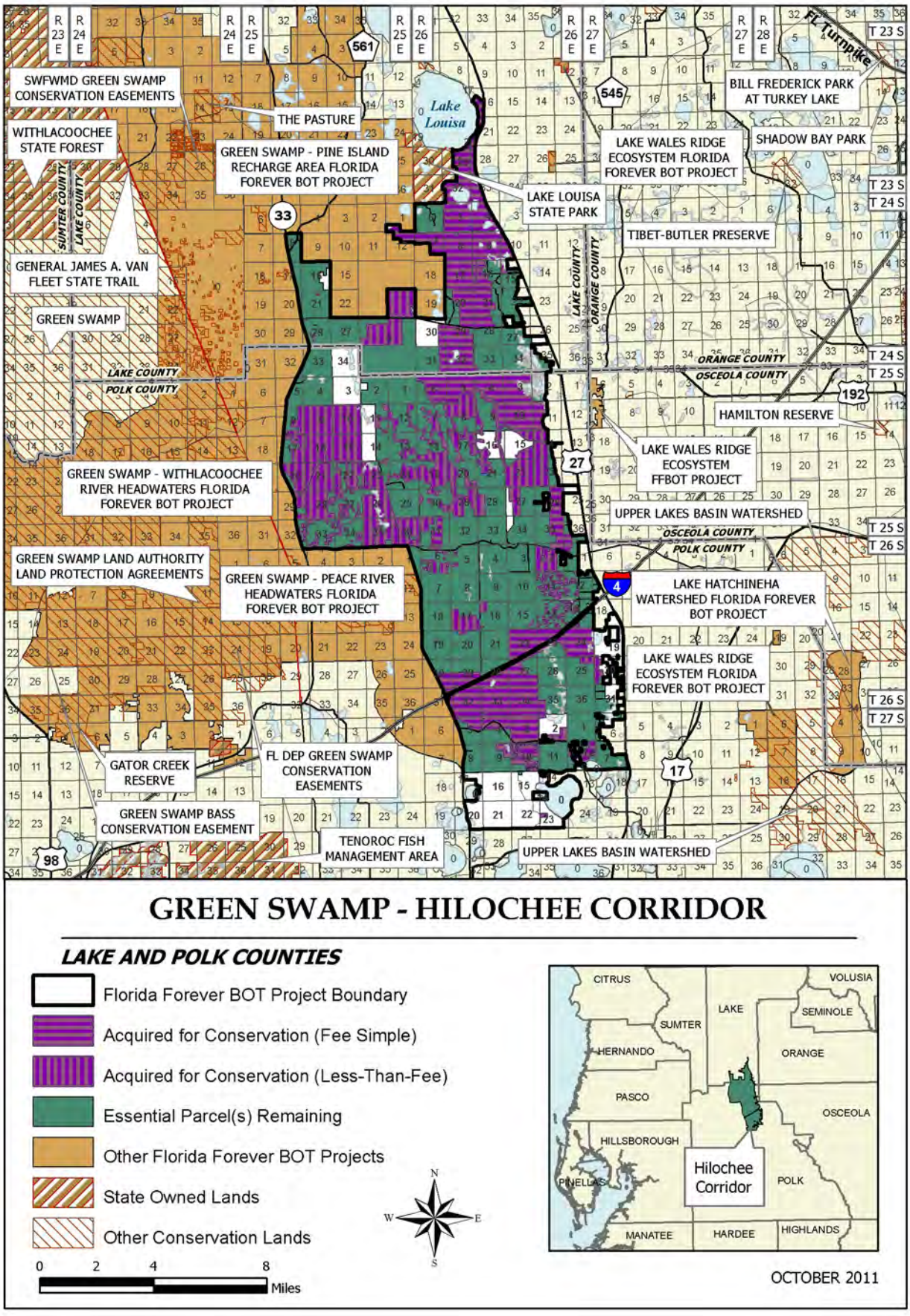
Management Prospectus

Qualifications for state designation The project has the size and wildlife resources to qualify as a wildlife management area (WMA). Its mosaic of land uses helps protect the Floridan Aquifer and the headwaters of several rivers that start in this region. The project preserves a large area for wildlife, and provides areas for public recreation in a fast-growing region between Tampa and Orlando.

Manager The FWCC will manage most of the project lands remaining to be acquired, as part of Hilochee WMA. The DRP will manage an 84-acre parcel within Lake Louisa State Park's optimum boundary. (Note: Lands within the boundary already acquired and managed for conservation are addressed in approved land management plans.)

Conditions affecting intensity of management The Hilochee Corridor requires resource-management methods for its natural areas, including prescribed fire, where appropriate. Other areas may require ecological restoration of ground cover, control of invasive species, and reforesting. These will be especially important to achieve the objectives of conserving habitats and populations of imperiled or rare species. Because of the importance of landscape ecology, a land use change near a managed area may affect efforts to reach resource conservation goals of the area, and the overall effective-

Green Swamp-Hilochee Corridor



ness of the necessary resource-management projects. Biotic monitoring is necessary to achieving resource-management goals. Infrastructure development will be appropriate to allow public access, and to provide facilities, security, and property management. Archeological and historic sites will be managed in coordination with the Florida Department of State, DHR. The DRP projects that the shift from protection and restoration efforts with limited public uses to a broader public use with more infrastructure will require a greater intensity of management.

Timetable for implementing management and provisions for security and protection of infrastructure When acquired, the FWCC will develop a management plan describing the goals and objectives to implement future resource management. The plan would also establish current and future roles of cooperating entities. Long-range goals will stress ecosystem management and protection and management of rare or imperiled species. The FWCC will assess the wildlife resources and provide planning support to enhance rare and imperiled species management and recovery of imperiled species. Prescribed fire and other resource-management activities will maintain and restore natural communities and vegetation to benefit native wildlife. Essential roads will be maintained; and unnecessary roads, fire lanes and hydrologic disturbance will be abandoned or restored as practical. Generally, development of facilities is to be kept to the minimum level necessary to assure protection of resources and to ensure the recreational experience. Where possible, such development would be confined to areas of previous disturbance. The DRP's resource management activities in the first year will concentrate on site security, protection of natural and cultural resources, and development of a resource inventory. Particular emphasis will be given to the monitoring of public land and water use planning and regulatory activities to ensure that adequate consideration is given to maintaining the quality of water resources associated with the project and any adjacent lake or other waters designated as Outstanding Florida Waters.

Revenue-generating potential Revenue could include sales of various permits and recreation use fees, and fees from ecotourism activities if such projects could be economically developed. Area regulations would be developed to identify the necessary permits and fees. The long-term value of this ecosystem to human health and local and regional land and water resources are thought to be significant. The DRP expects no significant revenue to be generated from this property immediately after fee title acquisition, and the amount of any future revenue will depend on the nature and extent of public use and development.

Cooperators in management activities The FWCC will cooperate in management of the Green Swamp-Hilochee Corridor project with SWFWMD, Florida Forest Service (FFS), Lake and Polk Counties.

Management costs and sources of revenue*

Resource Management	
Exotic species Control	$37,186
Prescribed Burning	$111,221
Cultural Resource Management	$1,794
Timber Management	$7,176
Hydrological Management	$193,739
Other	$805,332
Subtotal	**$1,156,447**
Administration	
General administration	**$10,636**
Support	
Land Management Planning	$103,285
Land Management Reviews	$20,133
Training/Staff Development	$5,339
Vehicle Purchase	$68,433
Vehicle Operation/Maintenance	$53,816
Other	$13,274
Subtotal	**$264,281**
Capital Improvements	
New Facility Construction	$89,694
Facility Maintenance	$311,312
Subtotal	**$401,006**
Visitor Services/Recreation	
Info/Education/Operations	**$60,032**
Law Enforcement	
Resource Protection	**$40,501**
TOTAL	**$1,932,903****

*The estimate of costs to operate and manage the area yet to be acquired is a projected estimate to fully implement management and reflects an estimate of the potential annual operating budget. All land management funding is dependent on annual legislative appropriations.

**Based on the FWCC's current staffing ratio of approximately one full-time employee (FTE) per 5,000 acres of managed area, eleven FTE positions would be optimal to fully manage the area covered by this prospectus. All land management funding is dependent upon annual legislative appropriations.

New 2/29/2012