ITEM 5:

Vote on whether to amend the Fisheating Creek Ecosystem Florida Forever Project Boundary to add two parcels totaling approximately ± 352 acres in Glades County with a tax assessed market value of $3,085,732.

LOCATION:

Glades County

DSL STAFF REMARKS:

The Woodward Ranch amendment proposed by Saunders Real Estate adds two parcels in Glades County totaling approximately ± 352 acres to the Fisheating Creek Ecosystem Florida Forever project. The two parcels are owned by Suzanne Woodward Trust. The parcels have a combined tax assessed value of $3,085,732 and are proposed for less-than-fee acquisition.

The Woodward Ranch property is in Glades County along U.S. Highway 27, five miles south of Venus in northern Glades County and three miles south of the southern tip of the Lake Wales Ridge. The property lies adjacent to the Fisheating Creek Ecosystem Florida Forever project. The property is within Priority 1 of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN), which identifies areas needed to maintain landscape-scale ecological functions throughout the state. The property is currently used for agriculture, cattle, sod production, hay cultivation, and recreation. As such, most of the property is comprised of improved pasture, a large area of wetlands, and small areas of hammock-like semi-improved pasture. The site's wetlands form a portion of the headwaters of Gopher Gully, a tributary of Fisheating Creek. Improvements include several residences, and additional buildings that support the ranching operations. All landowners have been contacted and are willing sellers. If acquired as a conservation easement, the property would protect critical lands within the Florida Wildlife Corridor and help to form a connection between two existing tracts of the Fisheating Creek Ecosystem Florida Forever project.

The proposal meets the criteria to be submitted as a boundary amendment. The parcels have a tax assessed value of less than $5 million. The proposal area should be designated as essential.

Project History:

The Fisheating Creek Ecosystem project in Glades and Highlands Counties was added to the CARL list in 1999. The project contains Fisheating Creek, the only undammed tributary to Lake Okeechobee. The project will help to ensure the survival of the Florida panther, the crested caracara and other native plant and animal species that depend on these critical lands.

The Fisheating Creek Ecosystem project includes over 191,974 acres with 99,176 acres remaining and is ranked number 1 in the Less-Than-Fee category on the 2025 Florida Forever Priority List. The tax assessed value for the remaining acres to be acquired in this project per property appraiser information (2024) is $798,087,927.

FNAI Review:

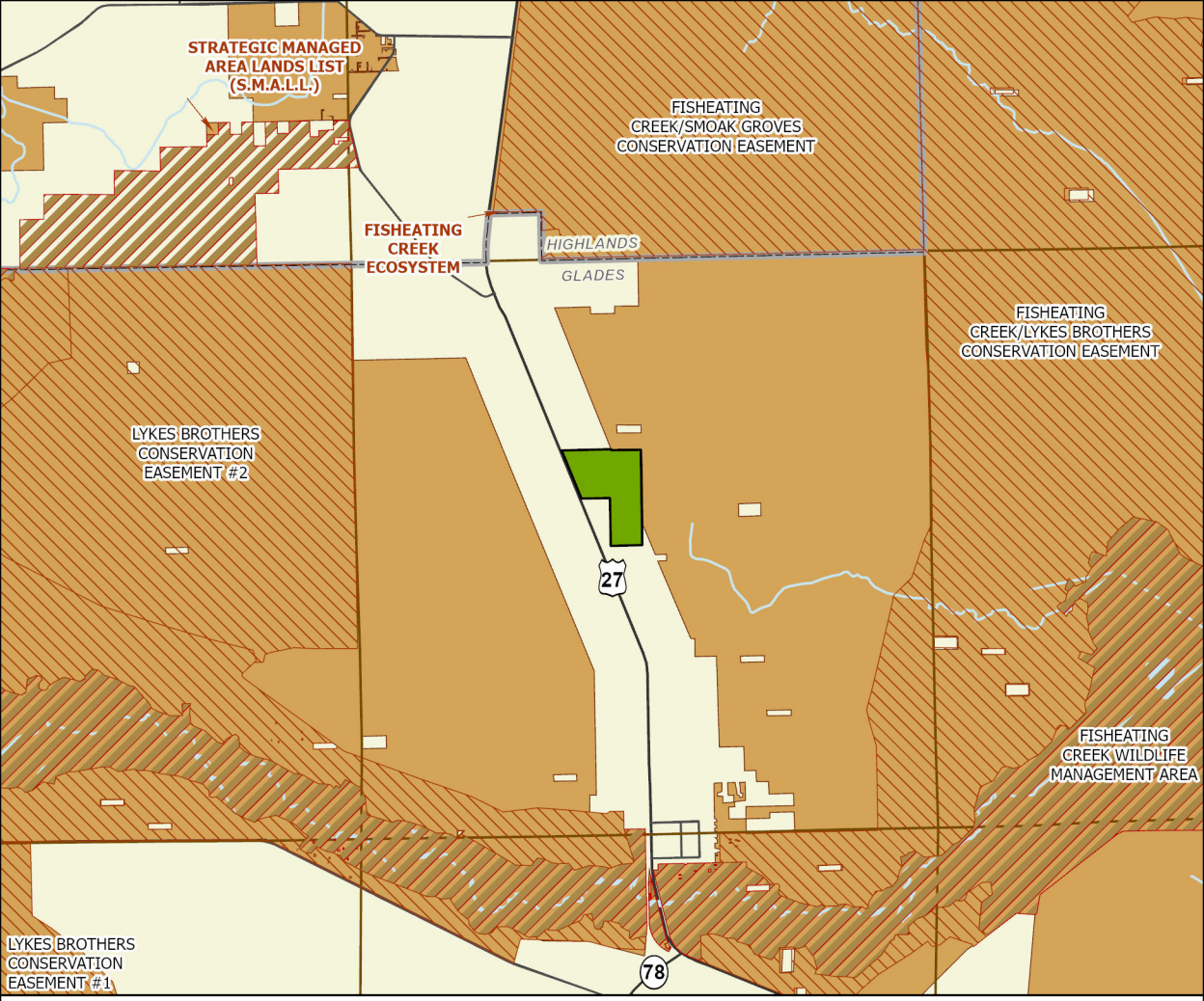
According to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), 100% of the site contributes to Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas, FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities, Ecological Greenways, Surface Water Protection, and Aquifer Recharge. About half of the site would contribute to Natural Floodplain Function, and 38% would contribute to protecting Functional Wetlands.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Vote on the proposed boundary amendment.

ARC RECOMMENDATION:

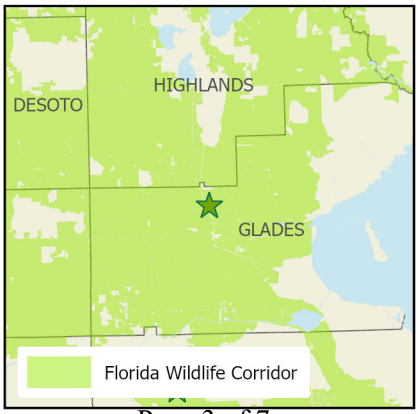
Project	DHR	FFS	Griner	DEP	FWC	Palmer	Peppers	Watts	Gamblin	Select
Fisheating Creek Ecosystem: Woodward Ranch										



FISHEATING CREEK ECOSYSTEM FLORIDA FOREVER PROJECT
WOODWARD RANCH BOUNDARY AMENDMENT

GLADES COUNTY

- Florida Forever Proposed Addition
- Florida Forever BOT Projects
- State Owned Lands
- Other Conservation Lands



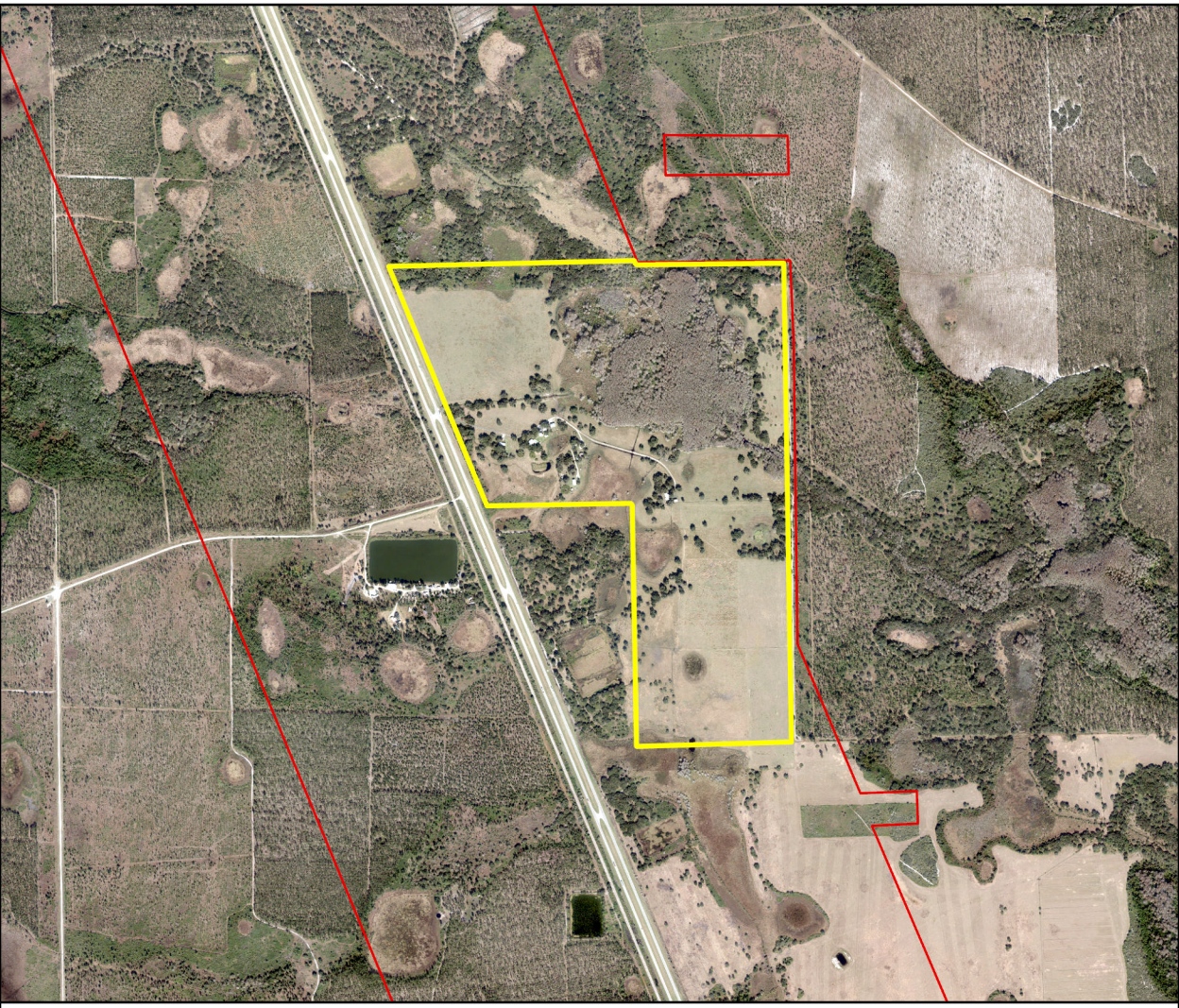
N

0 2 4 Miles

MAP BY FL NATURAL AREAS INVENTORY APRIL 2025

FISHEATING CREEK ECOSYSTEM FLORIDA FOREVER PROJECT
WOODWARD RANCH BOUNDARY AMENDMENT

FLORIDA FOREVER BOARD OF TRUSTEES PROJECT PROPOSED ADDITION AS OF APRIL 2025



Map Produced by: FL Natural Areas Inventory, N. Pasco, April 2025

Background: FDOT 2021 Aerial Imagery Resolution = 0.2 meter

FNAI

Florida Forever Proposed Addition

Florida Forever BOT Projects

N

0 0.25 0.5 1

Miles

Fisheating Creek Ecosystem Addition (Woodward Ranch): Florida Forever Measures Evaluation 20250422

GIS ACRES = 350

MEASURES	Resource Acres[a]	% of project
B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas		
Priority 1	305	87%
Priority 2	43	12%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	0	0%
Total Acres	348	100%
B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	2	< 1%
Priority 3	150	43%
Priority 4	113	32%
Priority 5	82	23%
Priority 6	2	< 1%
Total Acres	349	100%
B3: Ecological Greenways		
Priority 1	349	100%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	0	0%
Total Acres	349	100%
B4: Under-represented Natural Communities		
Upland Glade (G1)	0	0%
Pine Rockland (G1)	0	0%
Scrub and Scrubby Flatwoods (G2)	0	0%
Rockland Hammock (G2)	0	0%
Dry Prairie (G2)	0	0%
Seepage Slope (G2)	0	0%
Sandhill (G3)	0	0%
Sandhill Upland Lake (G3)	0	0%
Upland Pine (G3)	0	0%
Mesic/Wet Flatwoods (G4)	6	2%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	0	0%
Total Acres	6	2%
B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species		
G1	0	
G2	0	
G3	0	
G4	1	
G5	0	
Total	1	
C4: Natural Floodplain Function		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	28	8%
Priority 4	138	39%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	166	48%

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres[a]	% of project
C5: Surface Water Protection		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	260	74%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	89	25%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Priority 7	0	0%
Total Acres	349	100%
C7: Fragile Coastal Resources		
Fragile Coastal Uplands	0	0%
Imperiled Coastal Lakes	0	0%
Coastal Wetlands	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
C8: Functional Wetlands		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	32	9%
Priority 4	101	29%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	133	38%
D3: Aquifer Recharge		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	66	19%
Priority 4	229	65%
Priority 5	43	12%
Priority 6	11	3%
Total Acres	350	100%
E2: Recreational Trails (miles)		
(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)		
Land Trail Priorities	1.6	
Land Trail Opportunities	0.0	
Total Miles	1.6	
F2: Arch. & Historical Sites (number)	0	sites
G1: Sustainable Forestry		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	6	2%
Priority 5	0	0%
Total Acres	6	2%
G3: Forestland for Recharge	0	0%

[a]Acres of each resource in the project and percentage of project represented by each resource are listed except where noted. This analysis converts site boundary into pixels, which causes slight differences from GIS acres; this effect is most noticeable on small sites.

Florida Natural Areas Inventory

To: Meghan Lauer, DEP/OES
From: Geoffrey Parks, FNAI
Date: May 12, 2025
Subject: Proposed Boundary Modification to Florida Forever BOT Project: Fisheating Creek Ecosystem – Woodward Ranch (Glades County)

The major goals of the Fisheating Creek Ecosystem Florida Forever Project are to protect the vast prairies and flatwoods surrounding the only undammed tributary to Lake Okeechobee, and to help insure the survival of the Florida panther, crested caracara, and other native plant and animal species that depend on these lands. The ca. 350.1-acre Woodward Ranch property is proposed as an addition to the project. The property is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition.

The Woodward Ranch property is located ca. 5 miles south of Venus in northern Glades County, ca. 3 miles south of the southern tip of the Lake Wales Ridge. The property lies near the center of a largely agricultural area enclosed by conservation lands. Smoak/Lykes Brothers Conservation Easement is about 2 miles to the north, Fisheating Creek/Lykes Conservation Easement lies about 3 miles to the west and ca. 2.8 miles to the south, and Lykes Brothers Conservation Easement #2 lies about 2 miles to the west. The tract's eastern and some of its northern boundary are contiguous with unacquired portions of the Fisheating Creek Ecosystem FFBOT project, and a large block of additional lands 0.6 mile to the west are also within this project. About 0.55 mile of the tract's western boundary fronts US highway 27.

The proposed addition consists predominantly of improved pasture. A large area of wetlands (mostly basin swamp surrounded by open wet areas that were at least formerly wet prairie), a few additional scattered depression marshes, and small areas of hammock-like semi-improved pasture make up the remaining natural areas on the site. Several residential buildings and structures associated with agricultural uses are scattered along an interior road near the property's center. The site's wetlands are a portion of the headwaters of Gopher Gully, which flows generally eastward, meeting Fisheating Creek in Cowbone Marsh about 5 miles downstream.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission classifies Florida black bear as common in the region. Florida panthers have been documented in the surrounding area and have likely used the property at least occasionally, although it is outside of USFWS's designated panther habitat zones. FNAI's Florida Natural Heritage Database has no other documented records of rare or imperiled plants or animals on the site. This may be in part due to a lack of surveys, as at least a few species that use pastures (crested caracara, Florida sandhill crane) may be expected to use the property.

The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation (FFME) below is based on the Florida Forever Conservation Needs Assessment developed by FNAI. The data used in that analysis represent a standardized,

statewide perspective of natural resources. The FFME indicates that all of the proposed addition contributes to the following Florida Forever Measures: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (mostly priority 1), FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities (mainly priorities 3-5), Ecological Greenways (priority 1), Surface Water Protection (priority 2 and smaller amount of priority 4), and Aquifer Recharge (mostly priority 4). About half of the site would contribute to Natural Floodplain Function, and 38% would contribute to protecting Functional Wetlands.