

**ITEM 7:**

Vote on whether to amend the Green Swamp Florida Forever Project Boundary to add ten parcels totaling approximately  $\pm$  347 acres in Polk County with a tax assessed market value of \$884,970.

**LOCATION:**

Polk County

**DSL STAFF REMARKS:**

The Joshua Land Ranch amendment proposed by Saunders Real Estate adds ten parcels in Polk County totaling approximately  $\pm$  347 acres to the Green Swamp Florida Forever project. The ten parcels are owned by Joshua Land LLC. The parcels have a combined tax assessed value of \$884,970 and are proposed for less-than-fee acquisition.

The Joshua Land Ranch property is located about 15 miles north of Winter Haven and is approximately 0.25 miles south of the Green Swamp Project boundary. Other nearby conservation areas include various Green Swamp Conservation Easements, Van Fleet State Trail, Hilochee Mitigation Bank, and the Osprey Unit of Hilochee Wildlife Management Area. The property is primarily utilized for cattle and recreation. As such, improvements include a hunting cabin, and structures related to cattle operations. All landowners have been contacted and are willing sellers. If acquired as a conservation easement, the property would contribute to surface water protection and aquifer recharge and the conservation of habitat for species including sandhill cranes, swallow-tailed kites, and the gopher tortoise.

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 Green Swamp in Lake, Pasco and Polk Counties was added to the Florida Forever Priority List in 2015. The Green Swamp is vital to the water supply of central Florida. It gives rise to four major river systems and is important for maintaining the flow of water from the Floridan Aquifer. By preserving the combination of land uses in this region, the Green Swamp project will protect the Floridan Aquifer and several rivers, preserve a large area for wildlife to inhabit and use as wildlife corridors, and provide areas for public recreation in the rapidly growing region between Tampa and Orlando.

The Ranch Reserve project includes over 269,287 acres with 153,479 acres remaining and is ranked number 10 in the Partnerships and Regional Incentives 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 \$2,858,526,703.

*FNAI Review:*

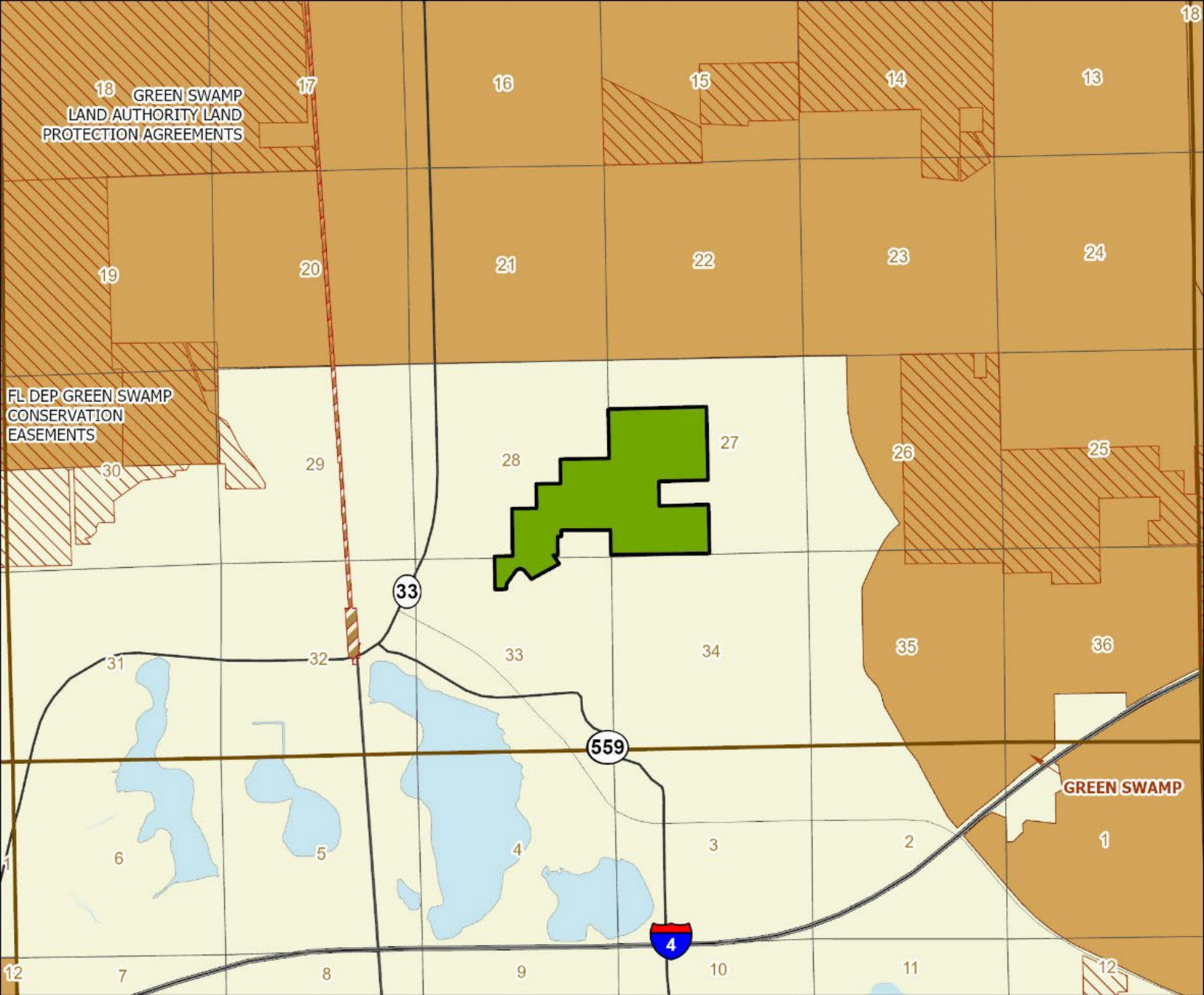
According to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), all or most (99–100%) of the proposal contributes to Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas, Aquifer Recharge, Surface Water Protection, and FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities. Approximately half of the property contributes to Sustainable Forestry, Functional Wetlands and Natural Floodplain Function..

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Vote on the proposed boundary amendment.

**ARC RECOMMENDATION:**

	DHR	FFS	Griner	DEP	FWC	Palmer	Peppers	Watts	Gamblin	Select
<b>Project</b>										
Green Swamp: Joshua Land Ranch										



## GREEN SWAMP FLORIDA FOREVER PROJECT JOSHUA LAND RANCH BOUNDARY AMENDMENT

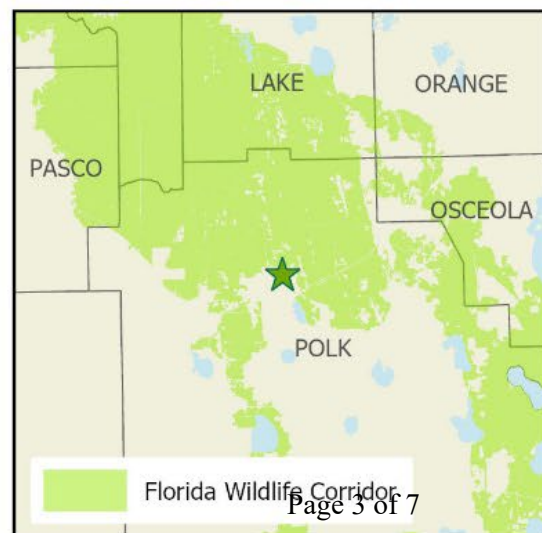
### POLK COUNTY

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



0 1 2 Miles

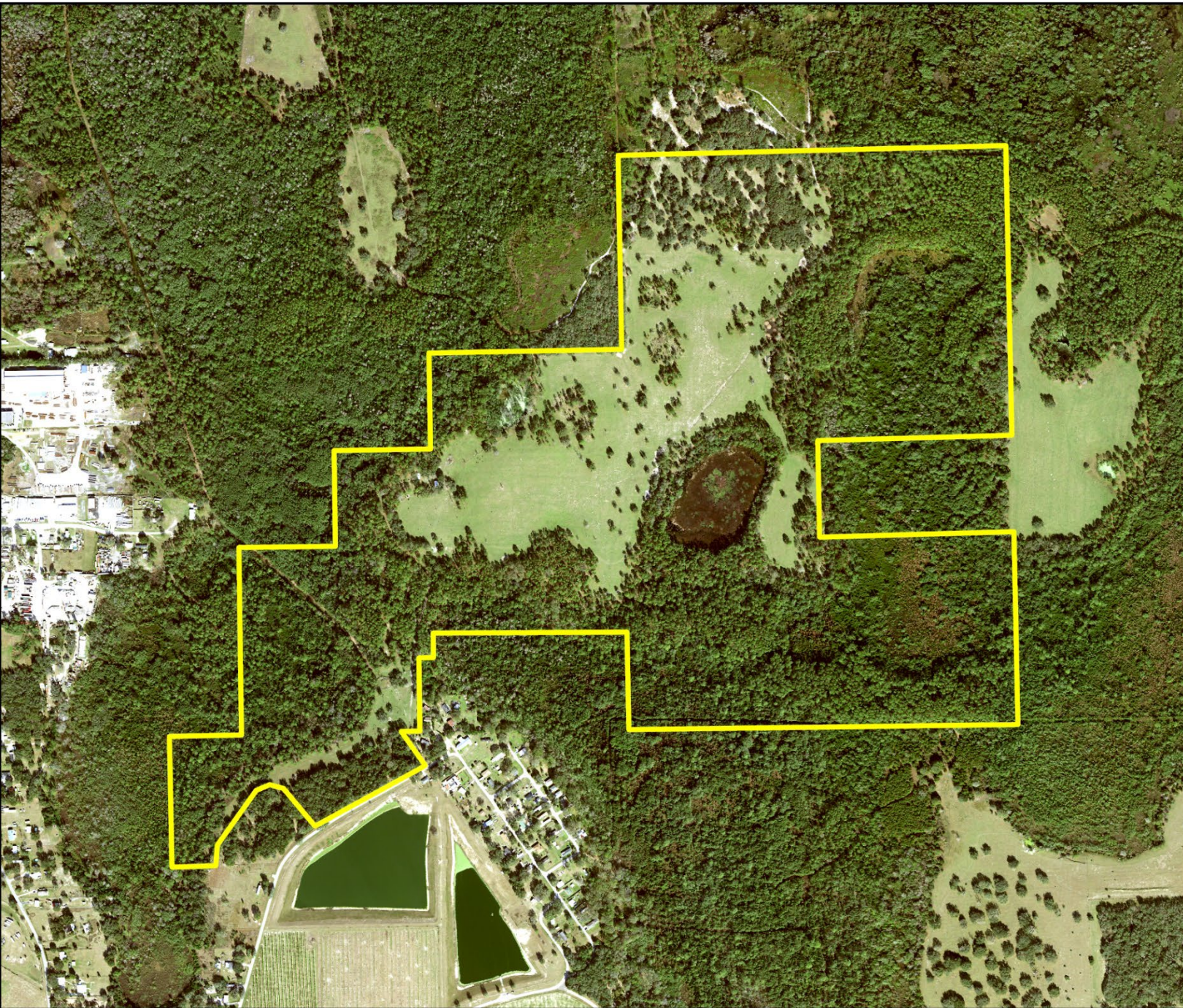
May 2025 ARC Meeting





# GREEN SWAMP FLORIDA FOREVER PROJECT JOSHUA LAND RANCH BOUNDARY AMENDMENT

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



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

Background: FDOT 2023 Aerial Imagery Resolution = 0.2 meter



Florida Forever Proposed Addition





## Green Swamp Addition (Joshua Land Ranch): Florida Forever Measures Evaluation 20250422

GIS ACRES = 347

MEASURES	Resource Acres <sup>a</sup>	% of project
<b>B1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas</b>		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	294	85%
Priority 3	51	15%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	1	< 1%
Total Acres	345	100%
<b>B2: FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities</b>		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	7	2%
Priority 5	89	26%
Priority 6	248	72%
Total Acres	343	99%
<b>B3: Ecological Greenways</b>		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	0	0%
Priority 5	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
<b>B4: Under-represented Natural Communities</b>		
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)	182	53%
Upland Hardwood Forest (G5)	0	0%
Total Acres	182	53%
<b>B6: Occurrences of FNAI Tracked Species</b>		
G1	0	
G2	0	
G3	0	
G4	0	
G5	0	
Total	0	
<b>C4: Natural Floodplain Function</b>		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	27	8%
Priority 3	124	36%
Priority 4	9	3%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	160	46%

MEASURES (continued)	Resource Acres <sup>a</sup>	% of project
<b>C5: Surface Water Protection</b>		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	19	5%
Priority 3	0	0%
Priority 4	327	94%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Priority 7	0	0%
Total Acres	346	100%
<b>C7: Fragile Coastal Resources</b>		
Fragile Coastal Uplands	0	0%
Imperiled Coastal Lakes	0	0%
Coastal Wetlands	0	0%
Total Acres	0	0%
<b>C8: Functional Wetlands</b>		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	15	4%
Priority 3	151	44%
Priority 4	8	2%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	174	50%
<b>D3: Aquifer Recharge</b>		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	114	33%
Priority 3	193	56%
Priority 4	40	12%
Priority 5	0	0%
Priority 6	0	0%
Total Acres	346	100%
<b>E2: Recreational Trails (miles)</b>		
(prioritized trail opportunities from Office of Greenways and Trails & Univ. Florida)		
Land Trail Priorities	0.0	
Land Trail Opportunities	0.0	
Total Miles	0.0	
<b>F2: Arch. &amp; Historical Sites (number)</b>		
	0 sites	
<b>G1: Sustainable Forestry</b>		
Priority 1	0	0%
Priority 2	0	0%
Priority 3	54	15%
Priority 4	15	4%
Priority 5	144	42%
Total Acres	213	61%
<b>G3: Forestland for Recharge</b>		
	192	56%

<sup>a</sup>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.



To: Meghan Lauer, DEP/OES  
From: Dale R. Jackson, Ph.D., FNAI  
Date: May 12, 2025  
Subject: Proposed Boundary Modification to Florida Forever BOT Project: Green Swamp – Joshua Land Ranch (Polk County)

The major goals of the Green Swamp Florida Forever BOT Project (GSFFBOT) are to protect the Floridan Aquifer and several rivers, preserve a large area for wildlife to inhabit and use as wildlife corridors, and provide areas for public recreation in the rapidly growing region between Tampa and Orlando. The ca. 347.4-acre Joshua Land Ranch property is proposed as an addition to the project. The property is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition.

The property is situated in north-central Polk County, 2 miles north of Interstate 4 at the southern end of the vast, multi-county Green Swamp. It lies immediately northeast of Polk City and Lake Agnes and north of Lake Helene. The nearest conservation lands are Hilochee Mitigation Bank 1 mile to the east, and numerous tracts of Green Swamp Land Authority Land Protection Agreements 1.25–2 miles to the north, west, and northwest. The latter tracts are contiguous with FL DEP Green Swamp Conservation Easements. General James A. Van Fleet State Trail passes 0.75 mile west of the proposal. Although not contiguous with GSFFBOT, the proposal is only 0.25 mile south (and 0.75 mile west) of the project.

Situated just north of the lakes region that characterizes central and north-central Polk County, and west of the north-south elevated ridges that support high biotic endemism in the eastern half of the county (and extending southward into Highlands County). Much of the lakes region was historically converted to citrus production, followed by urbanization and residential development.

Poorly drained soils cross most of the tract's southern portion, with land to the north rising from about 133 ft to a peak of 147 feet. Much of the higher land has been cleared and converted to improved pasture for grazing, although it also supports a pond (perhaps dredged) and mesic to shrubby forest that probably represents mesic flatwoods; scattered pines in the pasture suggest that it also once supported flatwoods. Lower lands support wetland mixed forest and freshwater marsh vegetation. Two rooftops visible near the western boundary may represent outbuildings or a hunting cabin; otherwise, the property is mostly undeveloped although it is fenced and cross-fenced for cattle.

The FNAI database has no records of rare/listed species on site, although bald eagles at least formerly nested just offsite. Absence of other records may reflect lack of on-site field surveys. The application

notes landowner observations of sandhill cranes (subspecies not noted), swallow-tailed kites, gopher tortoises, bald eagles, and fox squirrels.

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. All or most (99–100%) of the proposal contributes to Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas (priorities 2 and 3), Aquifer Recharge (priorities 2, 3, and 4), Surface Water Protection (chiefly priority 4), and FNAI Habitat Conservation Priorities (mostly priorities 5 and 6). Approximately half (46–56%) contributes to Sustainable Forestry (mostly priorities 3 and 5), Functional Wetlands (chiefly priority 3) and Natural Floodplain Function (priorities 2 and 3). About one-half of the site is remotely identified as mesic-wet flatwoods, an Under-represented Natural Community, although this may be an over-estimate of actual flatwoods.