

# Apalachicola River

Critical Natural Lands

Calhoun, Gadsden, Gulf, Jackson and Liberty Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	1991
<i>Project Acres</i>	58,228
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	9,316
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$11,940,578
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	48,912
<i>2023 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$50,712,899

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Apalachicola River project will protect the water quality of the river, preserve the productive and unique habitat of Apalachicola Bay, and provide the public with scenic outdoor recreation opportunities from Torreya State Park south to Wewahitchka and Dead Lakes. The project will protect much of Florida's remaining upland glades natural community that is not located within state-owned conservation lands. The project's rare plant community supports 16 endemic plant species and occurs nowhere else in Florida. The high plateaus, steep bluffs and deep ravines of the northern Apalachicola River valley are some of the most significant natural features of the southeastern Coastal Plain and the region is home to many rare, and endemic plants and animals, such as the endangered and nearly extinct Florida Torreya tree.

## General Description

The project consists of an upper and lower section along the Apalachicola River.

The upper section on the east side of the Apalachicola river includes a large tract on the east bank, running south from near Chattahoochee to Torreya State Park, including rich upland and floodplain forests and most of the upland glades in the state. It shelters several rare plants such as the Florida Torreya tree. The Land property, west of the former area, contains floodplain forest important for southeastern and gray bats. The tract is part of the Southeastern Bat Maternity Caves Florida Forever project. The Sweetwater Creek tract connects Torreya State Park with The Nature Conservancy's Apalachicola Bluffs and Ravines Preserve and includes some of the deepest steephead ravines in the state, with unique hardwood forests harboring many rare plants and animals. The uplands between the steepheads are a sand pine plantation that can be restored to longleaf pine.

The lower western section, located mostly south of State Road 20, is owned by a single landowner and includes approximately 44,000 acres of floodplain and bottomland forest with some areas of uplands. These lands along the Apalachicola River have a high potential for discovery of archaeological sites not yet documented by the Division of Historical Resources. All these areas are threatened by timbering and unrestricted vehicular access.



FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<b><u>FNAI Elements</u></b>	<b><u>Score</u></b>
<i>Florida torreya</i>	G1/S1
Gulf sturgeon	G3T2T3/S2?
Eastern indigo snake	G3/S2?
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>Gholson's blazing star</i>	G1/S1
Southern elktoe	G1/S1
<i>Apalachicola rosemary</i>	G1/S1
Torreya pygmy grasshopper	G1/S1
Brother spike	G1G2/S1
<i>Apalachicola wild indigo</i>	G2/S1
<i>fringed campion</i>	G2/S1?

**Public Use**

The Apalachicola River project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition which would limit public use; however, consideration of fee simple acquisition could expand public use opportunities. In either acquisition scenario, the project will provide habitat for wildlife including the Florida black bear and buffers for other conservation lands such as the St. Joe Timberland project and Southeastern Maternity Bat Caves project. Forestry uses could continue under a well-crafted forest stewardship management plan. Portions of the project purchased in fee simple would be managed as state parks or preserves, wildlife management areas or state forests, and allow such uses as hiking, nature appreciation, limited hunting and fishing and boat launching. Acquisition would also help complete the Florida National Scenic Trail, a statewide non-motorized trail that crosses several Florida Forever project sites. The trail is a congressionally designated national scenic trail.

**Acquisition Planning**

**1990**

On December 7, 1990, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council separated the Apalachicola River and Bay Conservation and Recreational Lands project into two projects: Apalachicola Bay and Apalachicola River, Phase I. The Apalachicola River, Phase I project included the Aspalaga Landing tract (800 acres/two owners), Atkins tract (3,210 acres/seven owners) and Gadsden County Glades (1,912 acres/13 owners) and had an estimated tax value of \$4,532,300.

**1992**

On April 7, 1992, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved a 4,570-acre addition to the project boundary. It consisted of 30 owners and a taxable value of \$1,813,157.

**1995**

On July 14, 1995, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved a 374-acre addition (Land property) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by the owner and had a taxable value of \$282,712. The tract is across from the Gadsden Glades tract and nearly adjacent to the Sneads Cave site of the Southeastern Bat Maternity Caves project.



**1996**

On December 5, 1996, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council transferred the Atkins/Trammell tract (approximately 3,210 acres) and the Hatcher tract (approximately 544 acres within the 9,145-acre Sweetwater site) to the Less-than-Fee category. A 613-acre conservation easement was acquired on the Hatcher tract in 2002.

**1999**

On May 6, 1999, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council designated an additional 11,800 acres (Lake Wimico) as essential.

On December 9, 1999, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council removed lands owned by The St. Joe Company in Gadsden Glades (360 acres), Aspalaga Landing (600 acres) and Sweetwater Creek (7,040 acres) and placed them in the St. Joe Timberland Conservation and Recreation Lands project.

**2001**

On April 6, 2001, the Acquisition and Restoration Council removed the Atkins/Trammell tract site (approximately 3,210 acres) from the project because the resources had been compromised and negotiations had reached an impasse.

**2002**

On April 25, 2002, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a less-than-fee, 2,242-acre addition (Corbin/Tucker site) to the project boundary. The addition was sponsored by The Nature Conservancy and consisted of two owners, David Corbin and Ken Tucker, with a taxable value of \$1,106,820. On August 15, 2002, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a less-than-fee, 1,514-acre addition of the Trammel tract (that was previously part of the 3,210-acre Atkins/Trammell tract that was removed on April 6, 2001) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Trammel, and had a taxable value of \$430,000.

**2003**

On February 7, 2003, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a fee simple and less-than-fee 3,113-acre addition to the project boundary. Sponsored by The Nature Conservancy, the addition consisted of four landowners, five tracts and had a taxable value of \$764,996. The tracts break down as follows: ~~(per tax card acres):~~ Soterra Crooked Creek tract, ~~447 acres;~~ Soterra Connector tract, ~~117 acres;~~ Thompson tract, ~~304 acres;~~ Hatcher tract, ~~160 acres;~~ and The Nature Conservancy Dupuis/Traveler's tract, ~~1,846 acres.~~

On October 17, 2003, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a less-than-fee, 1,244-acre addition (Glenn Summers tract) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by the owner, Glenn Summers, and had a taxable value of \$91,645.

**2007**

On December 23, 2007, the Northwest Florida Water Management District purchased a 1,544-acre conservation easement from Robert D./Kay S. Trammell and Robert Douglas Trammell and Meredith Trammell Roop for \$2,985,108. The easement is known as the Trammell tract.





### **2010**

On September 30, 2010, the Division of Recreation and Parks purchased 553 acres known as Torreya State Park Addition for \$1,418,000 from Plum Creek. The Division of Recreation and Parks will manage the addition.

### **2011**

On December 9, 2011, the Acquisition and Restoration Council placed the project under Florida Forever's Critical Natural Lands category.

### **2017**

In 2017, The Forestland Group proposed a less-than-fee project of more than 37,000 acres in the upper Apalachicola River. Approximately 700 acres of the Skyland Ranch tract was also added, proposed for fee simple acquisition. The proposal totaled 37,895 acres and had a tax-assessed value of \$5,756,412. In October 2017, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved this as a stand-alone project, naming it the Upper Apalachicola River Ecosystem Florida Forever project.

In December 2017, the Acquisition and Restoration Council moved to combine the newly approved Upper Apalachicola River Ecosystem project into the boundary of the existing Apalachicola River project.

In 2017, 288.26 acres in the project were acquired using Florida Forever program funding.

### **2020**

On August 21, 2020, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved an addition of 347 acres to the project boundary adjacent to the Apalachicola River Wildlife and Environmental Area in Gulf County.

### **2021**

In 2021, the Division of State Lands was awarded a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund for \$31 million to acquire, in fee, approximately 32,000 acres within the project. Additional funds were awarded to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to assist with start-up management of the land once acquired.

### **2023**

On June 9, 2023, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved the addition of seven parcels totaling 424 acres to the project boundary adjacent to the Apalachicola River Wildlife and Environmental Area in Calhoun County.

On October 13, 2023, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved the addition of five parcels totaling 665 acres to the project boundary in Jackson County.

DEP acquired, in fee, 758.5 acres in Liberty County from The Nature Conservancy.

### **Management Policy Statement**

The primary goals of management of the Apalachicola River project are to conserve the rich bluffs and ravines along the upper Apalachicola River which are unique in North America and provide important habitat for many rare plants and animals; to conserve and restore these important ecosystems and their plant and animal resources; to provide areas for natural resource-based recreation; and to preserve several significant archaeological sites. The project should be managed under the single-use concept, with management activities being directed toward the preservation of steephead streams, hardwood forests,





glades and archaeological sites, the removal of pine plantations and the restoration of natural pine forests. When complete, the project will include most of the bluffs and ravines in private ownership and will connect Torreya State Park, The Nature Conservancy’s Apalachicola Bluffs and Ravine Preserve, Apalachicola River Wildlife and Environmental Area, Apalachicola River Water Management Area and Apalachicola National Forest. Protection of the ecosystem will also help conserve Apalachicola Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. It has the appropriate size and location to achieve landscape-scale management goals.

**Manager(s)**

If acquired fee simple, the lower and middle sections of the project would be managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Area as part of the Apalachicola River Wildlife and Environmental Area, while the upper section (north of State Road 20) would be managed by the Division of Recreation and Parks as part of Torreya State Park. The portions of the project near the Torreya State Park and east of the Apalachicola River will be high-need management areas with an emphasis on public recreational use and development compatible with resource protection and management. During an initial 10-year pine restoration period, the Sweetwater Creek tract will be a low-need management area.

**Management Prospectus**

**Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management**

The unique and sensitive forests, glades and streams on the east side of the Apalachicola River qualify these lands as wildlife management areas, state forests, parks and preserves. The Atkins tract on the west side of the river has the size and wildlife resources to qualify as a wildlife management area.

**Management Implementation, Public Access, Site Security and Protection of Infrastructure**

Within the first year after acquisition, management activities will concentrate on site security, natural and cultural resource protection, and efforts toward the development of a plan for long-term public use and resource management.

**Revenue-generating Potential**

No significant revenue is expected to be generated in the first several years, nor any significant facilities developed initially after the lands are placed under the management of the Division of Recreation and Parks. The degree of future revenue generated will depend on the nature and extent of public use and facilities.

Management Cost Summary

<u>Florida Forest Service</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	CARL
Salary	\$105,910	\$105,910
OPS	\$0	\$0
Expense	\$30,000	\$30,000
OCO	\$168,000	\$13,000
FCO	\$0	\$0
TOTAL	\$303,910	\$148,910

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





Management Cost Summary

<u>Division of Recreation and Parks (Sweetwater)</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	CARL
Salary	\$83,306	\$72,319
OPS	\$24,960	\$44,720
Expense	\$16,800	\$49,730
OCO	\$101,252	\$1,000
FCO	\$0	\$0
TOTAL	\$226,318	\$167,769

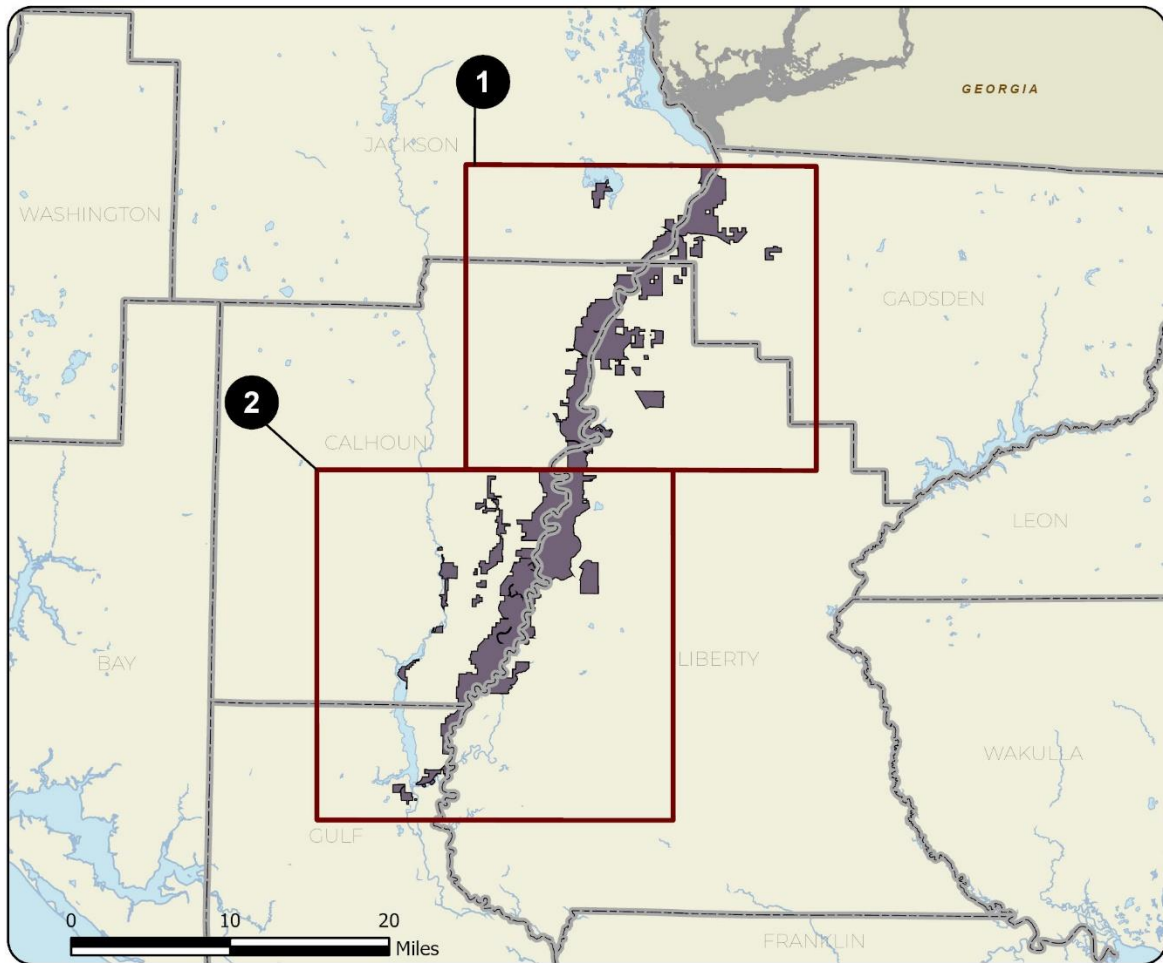
Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted

Management Cost Summary

<u>Division of Recreation and Parks (North)</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	CARL
Salary	\$72,319	\$72,319
OPS	\$44,720	\$44,720
Expense	\$49,730	\$49,730
OCO	\$81,527	\$1,000
FCO	\$0	\$0
TOTAL	\$248,296	\$167,769

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted



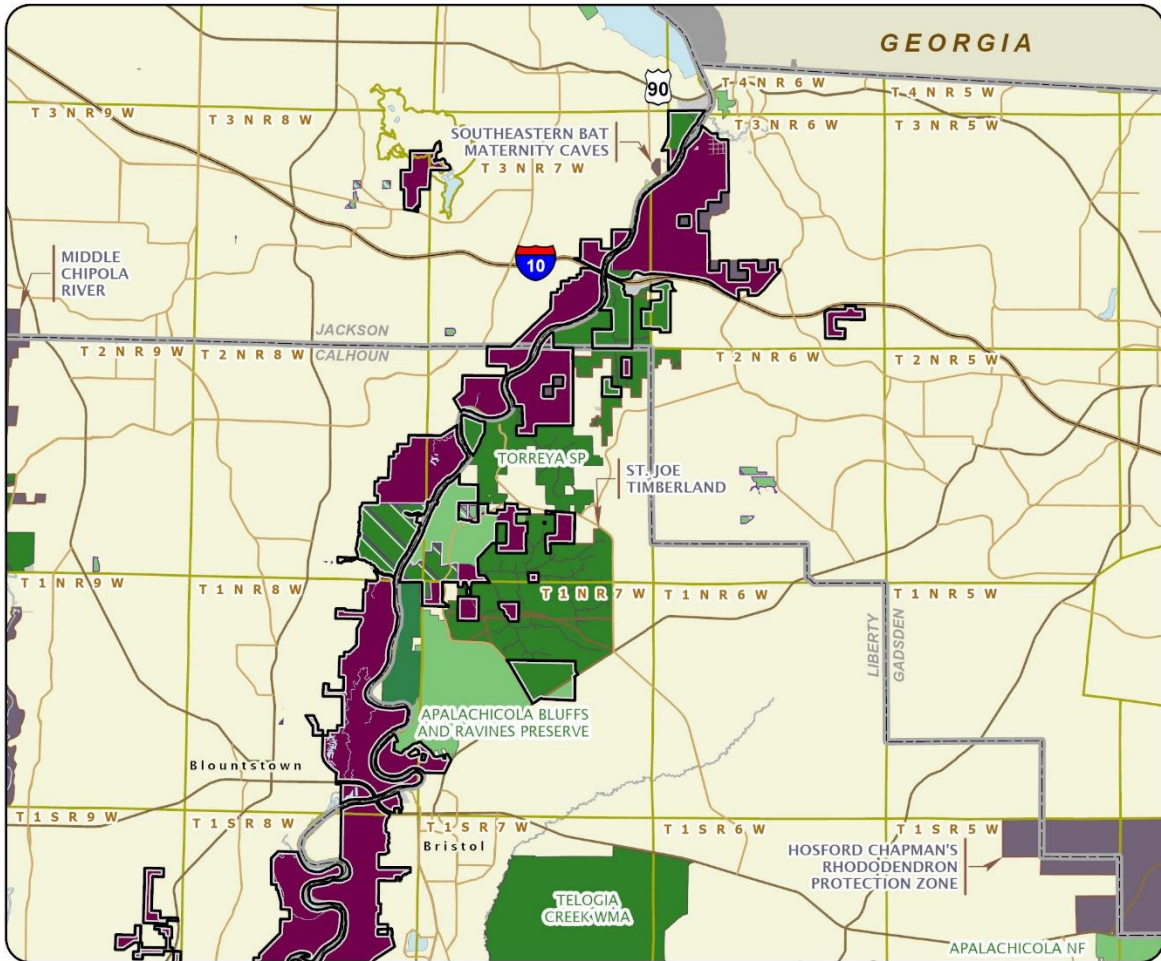


### APALACHICOLA RIVER: OVERVIEW

CALHOUN, GADSDEN, GULF, JACKSON, AND LIBERTY COUNTIES

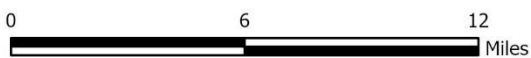




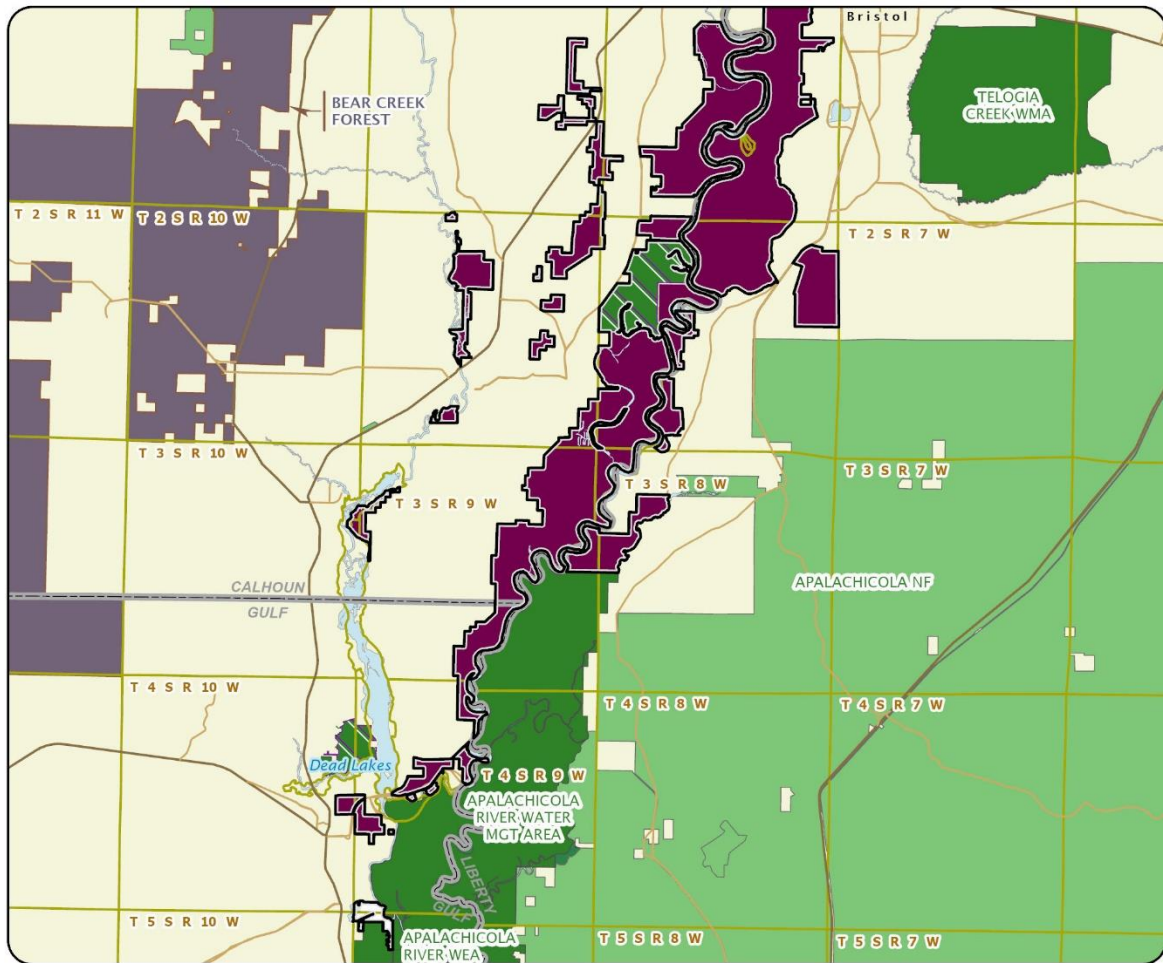


APALACHICOLA RIVER: MAP 1

CALHOUN, GADSDEN, JACKSON, AND LIBERTY COUNTIES







APALACHICOLA RIVER: MAP 2

CALHOUN, GULF, AND LIBERTY COUNTIES

