

Belle Meade

Critical Natural Lands

Collier County

| | |
|---|--------------|
| <i>Year Added to Priority List</i> | 1993 |
| <i>Project Acres</i> | 27,706 |
| <i>Acquired Acres</i> | 23,060 |
| <i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i> | \$38,403,758 |
| <i>Remaining Project Acres</i> | 4,646 |
| <i>2023 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i> | \$38,180,844 |

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Belle Meade project will help preserve the Rookery Bay estuary and conserve one of Southwest Florida's last large natural areas. The project's undeveloped cypress swamps and old-growth wet flatwoods are a significant component of the Rookery Bay watershed and provide important habitat for endangered wildlife such as Florida panthers, red-cockaded woodpeckers and Florida black bears. The project will provide resource-based recreation opportunities for residents and visitors in a rapidly urbanizing area of southwest Florida.

General Description

The project includes some of the most extensive examples of old-growth wet flatwoods (hydric pine flatwoods) in southwest Florida and high-quality, undisturbed subtropical dwarf cypress savanna communities. The hydrology of the hydric pine flatwoods and dwarf cypress communities within the project is relatively intact and these natural communities are vulnerable to hydrological disturbance.

The project will protect the habitat of at least 20 Florida Natural Areas Inventory-listed plants and animals, including the Florida panther, red-cockaded woodpecker and Florida black bear. Three archaeological sites have been recorded within the project boundaries and other sites may be present. The project is threatened by residential and commercial development.



FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

| <u>FNAI Elements</u> | <u>Score</u> |
|---|---------------------|
| Florida panther | G5T1/S1 |
| Red-cockaded woodpecker | G3/S2 |
| Florida black bear | G5T4/S4 |
| Gopher tortoise | G3/S3 |
| <i>ghost orchid</i> | G1/S1 |
| <i>narrow-leaved carolina scalystem</i> | G4T2/S2 |
| <i>fuzzy-wuzzy air-plant</i> | G4/S1 |
| <i>Florida dancing-lady orchid</i> | G4/S1 |
| <i>cowhorn orchid</i> | G5?/S1 |
| <i>powdery catopsis</i> | G5?/S1 |
| <i>tailed strap fern</i> | G5/S1 |
| <i>hand fern</i> | G4/S3 |

Public Use

The project will provide Picayune Strand State Forest with uses such as hiking, hunting and nature appreciation. Use will be limited during the wet seasons.

Acquisition Planning

1992

On December 10, 1992, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council added the Belle Meade project to the Conservation and Recreational Lands Priority List. The fee simple acquisition was sponsored by the Department of Natural Resources and The Conservancy, Inc.; it consisted of approximately 40,846 acres, 762 parcels, 504 landowners and a taxable value of \$62,933,000.

1994

On July 20, 1994, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council deleted approximately 11,985 acres located north of I-75 from the project area at the request of DEP. This also removed the Collier property and the property to the south adjacent to State Road 951. The approximate taxable value of the deletion was \$18,465,769.

On December 7, 1994, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council removed approximately 640 acres in the southwest corner and 160 acres in the southeast corner of the project. Approximately 500 landowners remained in the revised boundary, with parcels ranging from less than 10 acres in size to over 100 acres in size.

1995

On July 14, 1995, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved a fee-simple, 2,220-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by three landowners and consisted of 20 parcels. The acreage was included in the original project boundary but later deleted during the redefinition of the project boundary by the Belle Meade Work Group (appointed by the Land Acquisition Advisory Council in 1994). The work group consisted of landowners and representatives of local government, the South Florida Water Management District, state agencies and other experts. The final boundary recommended by the work group contained approximately 500 ownerships.





1996

On July 16, 1996, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved a fee-simple, 1,240-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by eight landowners and consisted of nine parcels. On October 30, 1996, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved a “Landowner Request Zone.” The zone defined areas in which a landowner may request inclusion in the boundary in writing. Highest priority was given to parcels within Land Acquisition Advisory Council-approved boundaries.

2006

On June 9, 2006, the Acquisition and Restoration Council moved the project from Group B to Group A on the 2006 Florida Forever Priority List.

On November 20, 2006, the Florida Natural Areas Inventory removed 490 acres from the project boundary at the request of private landowners Howard N. Galbut and Gary R. Edwards.

2007

In September 2007, The Conservancy of Southwest Florida donated 147 acres valued at \$2,310,000.

2009

On October 9, 2009, approximately 650 acres with an estimated donation value of \$10,457,520.00 were donated by Estates at Twin Eagles, LTD. The Florida Forest Service agreed to manage all acres.

2010

On August 13, 2010, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a 348-acre reduction (\$19,232,935 just value) to the boundary due to commercial development and infrastructure.

2011

In August 2011, Citigate Development donated 86.34 acres in Picayune Strand State Forest. The donation, valued at \$274,785, was to be managed by the Florida Forest Service.

On December 9, 2011, the Acquisition and Restoration Council placed the project into the Critical Natural Lands category.

2020

In August 2020, Mr. Bernard F. Gallagher, Jr. donated 1.29 acres to Picayune Strand State Forest with a donation value of \$4,567.

2021

DEP purchased 5.13 acres from the Estate of Brigida Gargiulo Green that will be managed by the Florida Forest Service as an addition to Picayune Strand State Forest.

2023

In October 2023, the Acquisition and Restoration Council voted to remove approximately 56 acres from the project that were deemed unsuitable for state acquisition.

Coordination

Recent acquisition partners include The Conservancy of Southwest Florida.





Management Policy Statement

The primary management goals of the Belle Meade project are to conserve, protect and restore critical habitats within the project area. These habitats include wet flatwoods and cypress swamps, which provide habitat for many rare and endangered species. The project will be managed under the multiple-use concept, with management activities directed toward protecting old-growth forests (using growing-season burns where necessary) and restoring natural surface water flows. When complete, the project will link Collier-Seminole State Park and Picayune Strand State Forest, approaching the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Manager(s)

The Florida Forest Service is recommended as manager.

Management Prospectus

Qualifications for State Designation

The Belle Meade project has the forest resources (extensive areas of old-growth South Florida slash pine) and the location (12 miles of common border with Picayune Strand) to make it highly suitable for management as a state forest.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

Portions of the project may require hydrological restoration, but these activities will likely be conducted by the South Florida Water Management District. No other notable disturbances are known. The Florida Forest Service expects its management efforts to be typical for a state forest.

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

After the core area is acquired, the Florida Forest Service will provide access for low-intensity outdoor recreation. Initial activities include securing the site, providing public and fire management access, conducting an inventory of resources and removing trash.

The site's natural resources and threatened and endangered species will be inventoried to develop a management plan. Long-range plans for the project are to restore disturbed areas to their original conditions, as far as possible, as well as protect threatened and endangered species. Some of the pinelands have been degraded by timbering and require restoration.

An all-season burning program will use, whenever possible, existing roads, black lines, foam lines and natural breaks to contain fires. Timber management will mostly involve improvement thinning and regeneration harvests. Plantations will be thinned and, where appropriate, reforested with species found in natural ecosystems. Stands will not have a targeted rotation age. Infrastructure will primarily be in disturbed areas and will be the minimum required for management and public access. The Florida Forest Service will promote environmental education. Budget needs for interim management are covered under the Save Our Everglades/Golden Gate Project.





Revenue-generating Potential

The Florida Forest Service will sell timber as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions. These sales will provide a variable source of revenue, but the Florida Forest Service expects the revenue-generating potential for the project to be low.

Cooperators in Management Activities

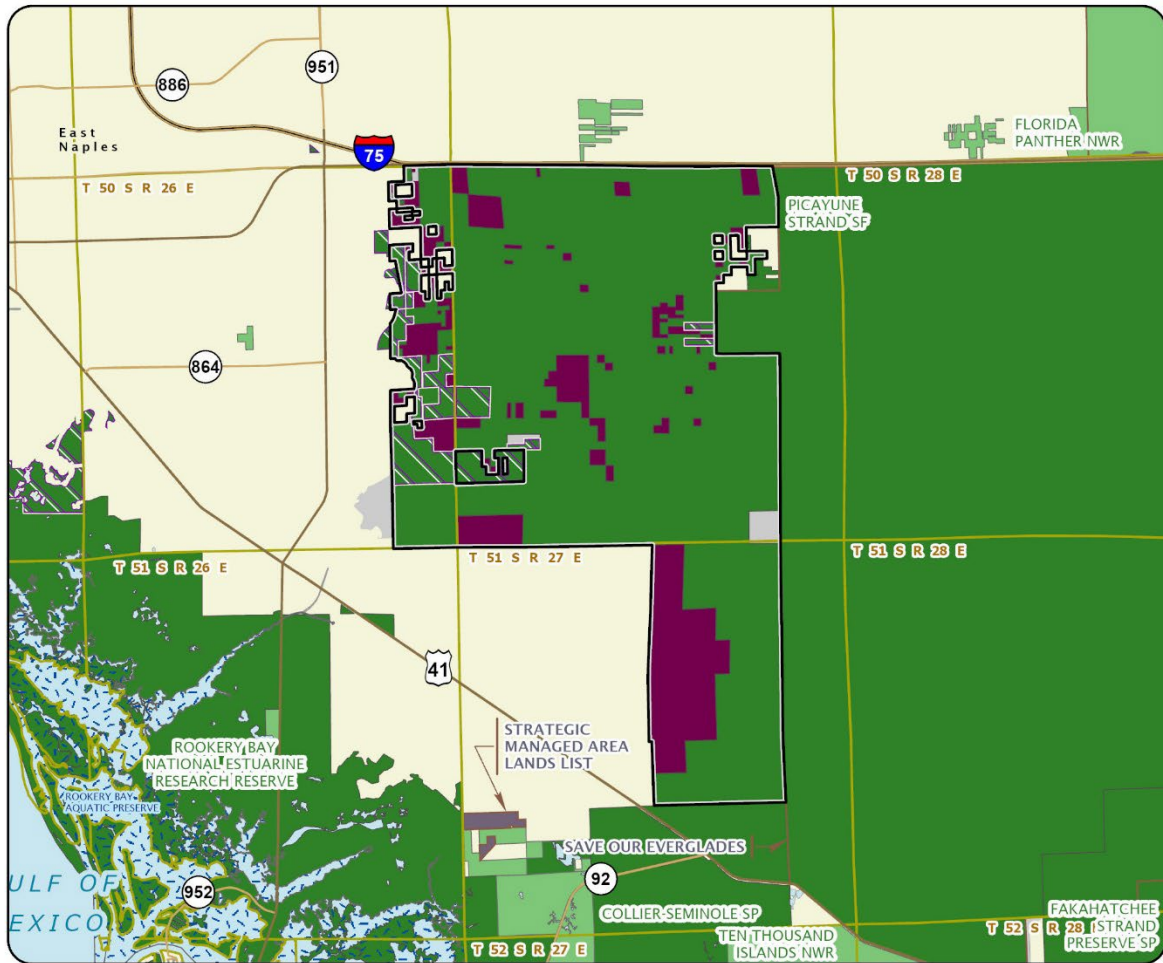
The Florida Forest Service will collaborate with other state agencies, local government entities and interested parties as appropriate.

Management Cost Summary

| <u>FFS</u> | <u>Startup</u> | <u>Recurring</u> |
|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| Source of Funds | LATF | LATF |
| Salary | \$0 | \$0 |
| OPS | \$9,140 | \$9,140 |
| Expense | \$0 | \$0 |
| OCO | \$44,000 | \$0 |
| FCO | \$0 | \$0 |
| TOTAL | \$53,140 | \$9,140 |

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





BELLE MEADE

COLLIER COUNTY

