

# Heartland Wildlife Corridor

Less-Than-Fee

Hardee and Highlands Counties

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| <i>Year Added to Priority List</i>            | 2022         |
| <i>Project Acres</i>                          | 9,579        |
| <i>Acquired Acres</i>                         | 0            |
| <i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>                 | \$0          |
| <i>Remaining Project Acres</i>                | 9,579        |
| <i>2023 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i> | \$67,119,573 |

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Heartland Wildlife Corridor project will create a contiguous landscape of working lands and conservation areas to provide a critical wildlife corridor along the western edge of Lake Wales Ridge. The project will protect a mix of open rangeland, wetlands, forests, hammocks, and prairie that provide valuable habitat for wildlife and important water quality protection for the Peace River, Charlotte Harbor, Fisheating Creek and Lake Okeechobee.

## General Description

The Heartland Wildlife Corridor project is proposed as a less-than-fee acquisition, and contains 67 parcels owned by 13 landowners. The project is located along the Hardee-Highlands County border, south of State Road 66. Almost all the properties included in the project are working cattle ranches, except one property that is a wholesale plant nursery.

The project area contains mostly pasture and altered landcovers. The most abundant natural community in the project is mesic hammock. Depression marshes occur throughout the project area, often found in the pastures, and occasionally embedded within flatwoods. The mesic flatwoods within the project vary significantly in their condition and management. In several locations, active management through fire, mowing and/or chopping has allowed a relatively complete assemblage of native plants to persist, including dense wiregrass in some areas. Wetland communities include hydric hammock and occasional basin swamps. A small, ditched blackwater stream found on Dark Hammock Ranch forms the headwaters of Fisheating Creek.

This assemblage of properties along with existing conservation lands provides a vital ecological corridor along the western edge of Lake Wales Ridge to support several imperiled species. Most of the proposed project area falls within Priority 1 of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network.



FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

| <b><u>FNAI Elements</u></b> | <b><u>Score</u></b> |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| Swallow-tailed kite         | G5/S2               |
| Florida black bear          | G5T4/S4             |
| Florida sandhill crane      | G5T2/S2             |
| Crested caracara            | G5/S2               |
| Southeastern fox squirrel   | G5T5/S3S4           |

**Public Use**

The Heartland Wildlife Corridor project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition with no public access.

**Acquisition Planning**

**2022**

On October 14, 2022, the Acquisition and Restoration Council added the Heartland Wildlife Corridor project to the 2023 Florida Forever Priority List.

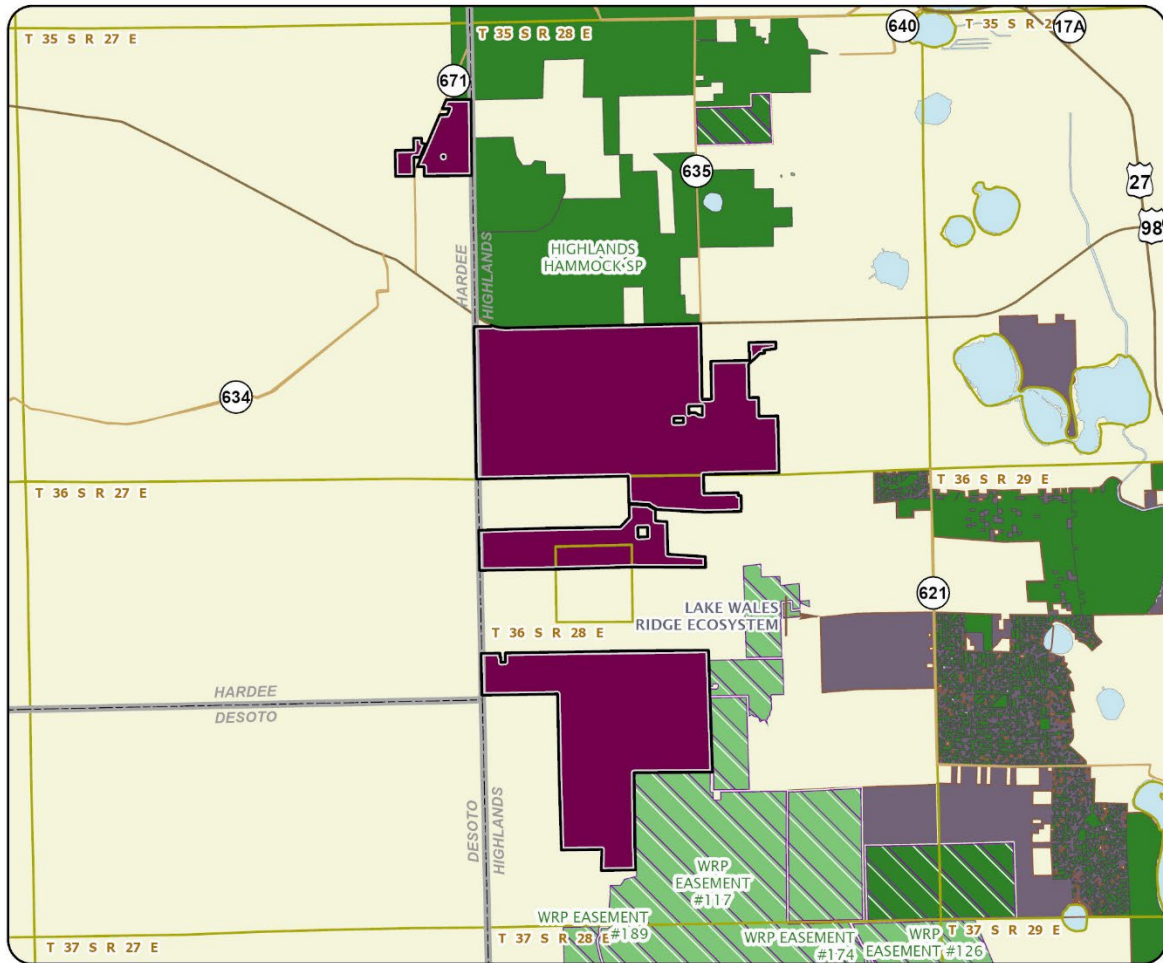
**Management Policy Statement**

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Heartland Wildlife Corridor project would be managed by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

**Manager(s)**

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of the Heartland Wildlife Corridor project would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring to confirm continued conservation easement compliance would be coordinated by the Division of State Lands.





### HEARTLAND WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

#### HARDEE AND HIGHLANDS COUNTIES

