

# Panther Glades

Critical Natural Lands

Hendry County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2001
<i>Project Acres</i>	64,810
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	25,458
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$40,564,708
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	39,352
<i>2023 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$175,959,798

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Panther Glades project is a large landscape and watershed in south-central Hendry County that forms a wildlife corridor between multiple Florida Forever projects, including the Devil’s Garden, Half Circle L Ranch and Save Our Everglades projects. This region is essential to maintain a viable population of the Florida panther and additional native wildlife species that require extensive swaths of habitat such as the Florida black bear and the Eastern indigo snake.

## General Description

Located in south-central Hendry County, the Panther Glades project is a mosaic of forested uplands interspersed among forested wetland communities. A portion of the project’s southwestern boundary shares one mile with the Save Our Everglades project, and a portion of the southeastern boundary borders Big Cypress National Preserve.

## FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<b><u>FNAI Elements</u></b>	<b><u>Score</u></b>
Florida panther	G5T1/S1
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Swallow-tailed kite	G5/S2
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
<i>redmargin zephyrlily</i>	G2G3/S2S3
Wood stork	G4/S2
Florida burrowing owl	G4T3/S3
Crested caracara	G5/S2
<i>hand fern</i>	G4/S3
<i>banded wild-pine</i>	G5/S3
Bald eagle	G5/S3
Glossy ibis	G5/S3



## Public Use

Portions of the project acquired in fee simple have the potential for outdoor resource-based recreation such as hiking, hunting, camping and wildlife viewing. Ecotourism may be appealing to landowners willing to consider conservation easements. Further study will need to be accomplished to determine the desirability of cultural resource interpretation.

## Acquisition Planning

### **2001**

On January 25, 2001, the Acquisition and Restoration Council added the Panther Glades project to Group A of the 2001 Florida Forever Priority List. The fee-simple and less-than-fee acquisition, sponsored by The Nature Conservancy, consisted of approximately 21,223 acres, multiple owners and had a taxable value of \$3,947,680.

On July 12, 2001, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a fee-simple, 20,895-acre addition (Dinner Island) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by The Nature Conservancy, consisted of one owner, Hilliard Bros. of Florida LTD, and had a 2000 taxable value of \$5,364,370.

### **2002**

On December 5, 2002, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a fee-simple, 3,860-acre addition (Barfield Tract) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by The Nature Conservancy, consisted of one owner and had a taxable value of \$3,098,640.

### **2003**

On April 18, 2003, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a fee-simple, 1,615-acre addition to the project boundary. Sponsored by Acquisition and Restoration Council Vice Chair Jack Moller, it consisted of one owner and had a taxable value of \$1,550,990. The addition was a transfer of acreage from the Save Our Everglades Florida Forever project into the project.

On June 6, 2003, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved a fee-simple, 3,711-acre addition (Crow's Nest Tract) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by the landowner and had a taxable value of \$8,630,020.

On August 27, 2003, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved the removal of approximately 3,075.4 acres from the project at the request of the landowner, the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

### **2007**

On December 14, 2007, the Acquisition and Restoration Council moved the Panther Glades project to Group B of the Florida Forever Priority List.

### **2008**

On January 7, 2008, the Florida Panther Conservation Bank Endowment Fund Trust established a conservation easement on 1,930.05 acres within the project boundary.

On December 12, 2008, the Acquisition and Restoration Council voted to extend the boundary of the Panther Glades project by adding a less-than-fee 4,208-acre parcel (McDaniels Ranch Reserve) with a taxable value of \$20,456,810. The proposal was submitted as a stand-alone project and designated as essential.





## **2009**

On June 12, 2009, the Acquisition and Restoration Council added the Kissimmee Billy Strand project (fee simple), including the Green Glades/Bergeron property (less-than-fee), to the Panther Glades project. The proposal consisted of 4,694 acres with a taxable value of \$12,300,000. Initially submitted as a stand-alone project, the proposal was later amended into the Panther Glades project boundary.

## **2011**

On April 13, 2011, the U.S. Department of Agriculture established a 1,288.82-acre conservation easement as part of its Natural Resources Conservation Service Wetlands Reserve Program.

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

## **2024**

On April 12, 2024, the Acquisition and Restoration Council approved the addition of the Finca Vigia project proposal (1,886 acres) in Hendry County to the project boundary.

### **Coordination**

The Nature Conservancy is considered an acquisition partner. Efforts will be made to coordinate with state and local governmental agencies including the Florida Forest Service, DEP and the South Florida Water Management District in management of the property.

### **Management Policy Statement**

The principal purposes of the project are to protect habitat important to imperiled and rare species (like the Florida panther and Florida black bear) and to preserve the hydrological connection to protected lands to the south.

### **Manager(s)**

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is recommended as the manager. The Florida Forest Service is recommended as a cooperating agency.

### **Management Prospectus**

Priority will be given to the conservation and protection of environmentally unique native habitats and threatened and endangered species. Management programs will be designed to conserve, protect, manage and restore important ecosystems, landscapes, forests and water resources. The tract will also be managed to provide opportunities for hunting, camping, hiking, environmental and cultural resource education, and other natural resource-based recreational activities. Due to the project's purpose, management goals will be oriented toward conservation of imperiled species.

### **Qualifications for State Designation**

The Panther Glades project has the resource diversity to qualify as a wildlife and environmental area.

### **Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management**

Some project tracts are low need, requiring basic resource management including the frequent use of prescribed fire where appropriate. A significant portion of the uplands have been developed for agriculture or other purposes; therefore, restoration activities are contemplated for some of the acreage.





The primary management needed for perpetuation of the less disturbed natural communities would involve the introduction of prescribed fire and control of human access. Biotic surveys should be a priority, since there are potentially many taxa of rare or listed species. Development of facilities would be kept to a minimum to assure a high-quality recreational experience, and any such development would be confined to areas of previous disturbance. Restoration activities would focus on pastureland reforestation and hydrological restoration following a full assessment of the necessity for such activities. Invasive species can likely be controlled if control activities are implemented hastily.

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

During the first year after acquisition, emphasis will be placed on site security, posting boundaries, public access, fire management, resource inventory, exotic species control and removal of refuse. A management plan will be developed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission describing the management goals and specific objectives necessary to implement future resource management. The management plan will also establish future roles of cooperating entities including governmental agencies and other stakeholders.

Longer-range plans will emphasize ecosystem management and the protection of threatened and endangered species. Following completion of plant community inventory and historic vegetation analysis, quantified vegetation management objectives would be developed pursuant to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's objective-based vegetation management process. Additionally, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Wildlife Conservation Prioritization and Recovery Program would provide assessment, recovery and project planning support to enhance management of focal species and recovery of listed species. An all-season prescribed burning management plan will be developed and implemented using conventional and biologically acceptable guidelines. Management activities will strive to manage natural plant communities to benefit native wildlife resources. Programs providing multiple recreational uses will also be implemented.

Environmentally sensitive areas will be identified, and appropriate protective measures will be implemented on those areas. Unnecessary roads, fire lanes and hydrological disturbances will be abandoned or restored as practical. Minimal infrastructure development will be required to allow public access, provide facilities for the public and provide security and management of the property.

Archaeological and historic sites would be managed in coordination with the Division of Historical Resources. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission should cooperate with other state and local governmental agencies including the Florida Forest Service, DEP and the South Florida Water Management District in management of the property.

### **Revenue-generating Potential**

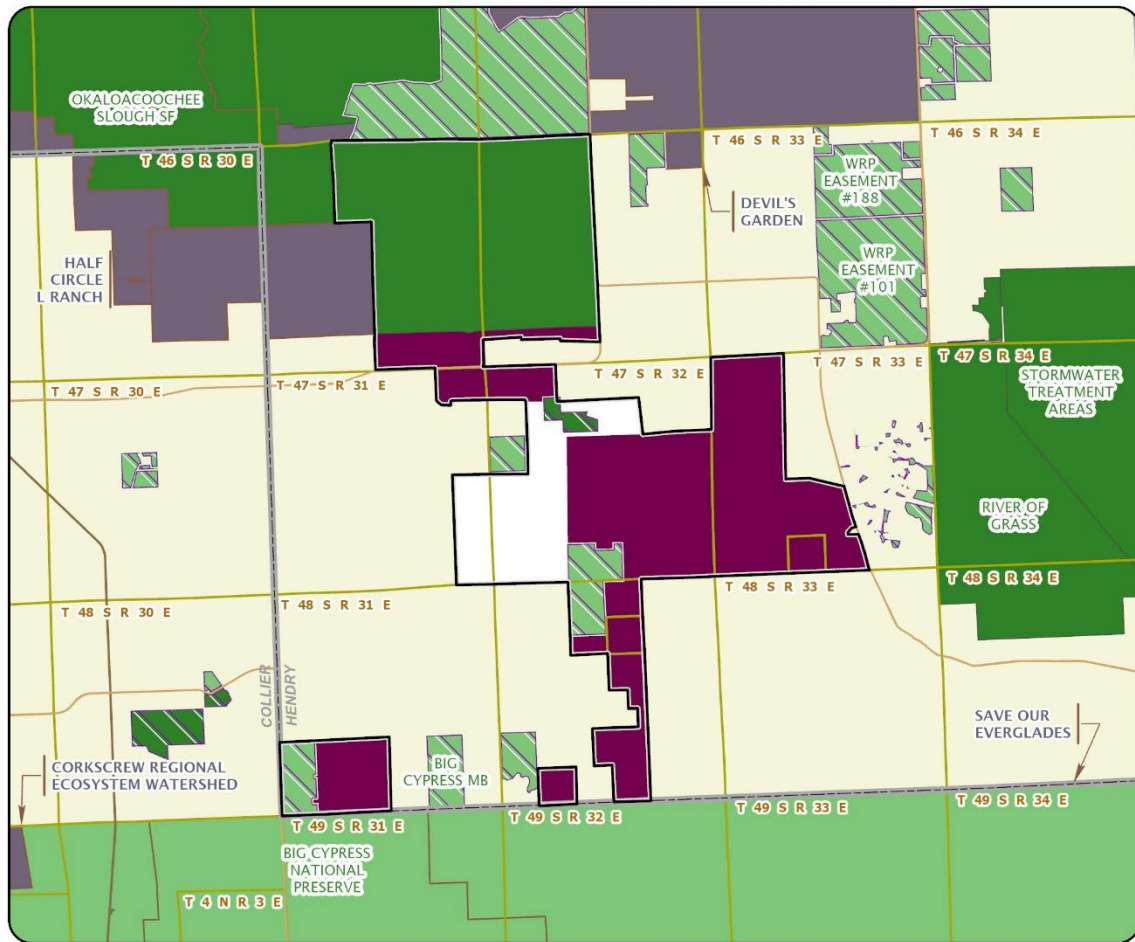
The revenue-generating potential is not known and will depend upon future uses approved in the management plan. Since very little of the project is currently appropriate for forest products production, future revenue from timber resources will depend on successful reforestation and management of the restored pasturelands and other disturbed areas. If appropriate, revenue might be generated from grazing leases in flatwoods or pastured areas not restored in the interest of habitat diversity or due to lack of funding. Additional revenue would be generated from sales of hunting licenses, fishing licenses, wildlife





management area permits and other special hunting permits and user fees. Some revenues might also be realized in the future from recreational user fees and ecotourism activities. Long-term value of ecosystem services to local land and water resources, and to human health, are expected to be significant if the Legislature appropriates funds for land management.





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