

Baker County Timberlands

Less-Than-Fee

Baker County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	<i>2024</i>
<i>Project Acres</i>	<i>1,155</i>
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	<i>1,155</i>
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	<i>\$1,636,595</i>

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Baker County Timberlands project will serve as a strategic buffer for the adjacent Osceola National Forest. This project will help to conserve habitat for long-ranging species such as the Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*) that utilize the property as a travel corridor. The project will also contribute to the protection of water resources of Bluff Creek and the greater St. Marys River Basin.

General Description

The Baker County Timberlands project contains one parcel, totaling 1,154 acres, situated along the eastern border of the Osceola National Forest. The St. Marys River lies approximately 1.5 miles to the east. The county-managed St. Marys Shoals Park lies 1.9 miles to the southeast and John M. Bethea State Forest lies 2.6 miles to the north. Most of the project is located within a region of the state considered frequent black bear range. The property provides cover for these and other wide-ranging species moving through the region's conservation lands.

The property is situated on the Ocean Pond Plain Province of the Okefenokee Basin District, a broad east-sloping terrace characterized by extensive flatwoods and basin swamp. Elevations range from 118 feet above mean sea level to 100 feet where Bluff Creek exits the property along its eastern border. Predominant soils include Sapelo fine sands, Olustee-Pelham complex and Pantego-Pamlico complex. A series of branches coalesce on the property to form Bluff Creek, a small tributary of the St. Marys River. The St. Marys River is an important spawning habitat for the federally endangered Atlantic sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus oxyrinchus*).

Land use on the property is primarily plantation forestry, which covers approximately 80 percent of the site. Most of the plantations have been harvested within the past five years and not yet replanted. Cypress was selectively thinned from at least half of the swamps more than 30 years ago. Ten percent of the property remains in natural condition; most of this acreage is wetlands that were not included in tree harvesting.



Pine plantation is the most extensive landcover on the property. Natural regeneration is present, seeded in from remnant slash pines. The shrub layer height is remarkably low given the lack of prescribed fire. A small, mostly intact patch of wet flatwoods features a dense canopy of slash pine with many large trees. Bottomland forest occurs along with floodplain swamp as a narrow band along the headwaters of Bluff Creek. Basin swamp is present in some parts of the large depressional wetlands that were not cut or substantially thinned, and dome swamps are scattered throughout the property, often with an open canopy of pond cypress. Successional hydric shrubland/forest is present where all portions of the former basin swamps were harvested.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements

Florida black bear

Score

G5T4/S4

Public Use

The Baker County Timberlands project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition with no public access.

Acquisition Planning**2024**

On November 1, 2024, the Acquisition and Restoration Council voted to add the Baker County Timberlands project to the 2025 Florida Forever Priority List.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Baker County Timberlands project would be managed by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

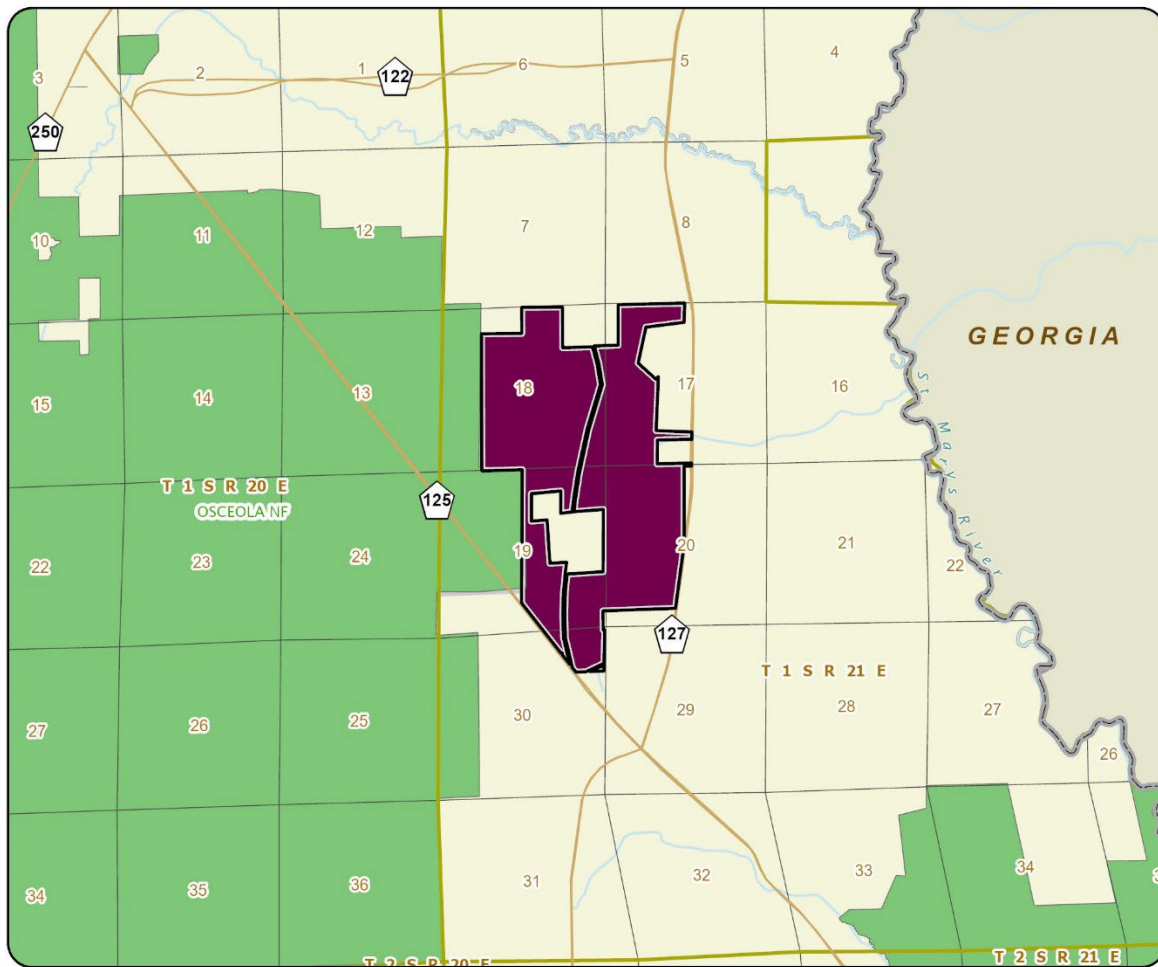
Manager

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of the Baker County Timberlands project would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management to confirm continued conservation easement compliance will be coordinated by the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Division of State Lands.

Management Prospectus

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