

Bowlegs Creek Watershed

Less-Than-Fee

Polk County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	<i>2024</i>
<i>Project Acres</i>	<i>1,016</i>
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	<i>1,016</i>
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	<i>\$3,461,964</i>

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Bowlegs Creek Watershed project will help to protect the water resources of Bowlegs Creek, a tributary of the Peace River. This project will also protect foraging areas and potential nesting sites for imperiled wading birds and conserve open space within the Florida Wildlife Corridor to benefit a variety of wildlife species in an area with a high potential for development.

General Description

The Bowlegs Creek Watershed project comprises two disjunct parcels and is located about 3.5 miles southeast of Fort Meade. The two tracts flank the floodplain of Bowlegs Creek.

Approximately 10% of the property is in natural condition, consisting primarily of bottomland forest. The remaining 90% of the property is altered due to historic phosphate mining activity on the property. The majority of the property is actively used for cattle grazing. Invasive plants are common, with the most abundant and widespread being cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*). Improved pastures often form a patchwork with large areas of invasive exotic monoculture. A small portion of the of the property (8%) consists of defunct citrus groves.

Borrow areas encompass a significant area (16%) of the property. While variable in composition, they are well established with recruited vegetation from adjacent and historic wetlands on site. These were observed to be in use by a variety of waterfowl, listed wading birds including roseate spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*), Florida sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis pratensis*) and several gull-billed tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*). Successional hardwood forest occupies 6% of the site and presents as small, disjunct stands adjacent to borrow areas and bottomland forest.



FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Swallow-tailed kite	G5/S2
<i>redmargin zephyrlily</i>	G2G3/S2S3
Roseate spoonbill	G5/S2
Gull-billed tern	G5/S2
Snowy egret	G5/S3
Little blue heron	G5/S4
Tricolored heron	G5/S4
White ibis	G5/S4

Public Use

The Bowlegs Creek Watershed 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 Bowlegs Creek Watershed project to the 2025 Florida Forever Priority List.

Coordination

The Bowlegs Creek Watershed project was approved for the Polk County Forever program in 2024. Polk County is a potential acquisition funding partner.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Bowlegs Creek Watershed project would be managed for conservation purposes by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

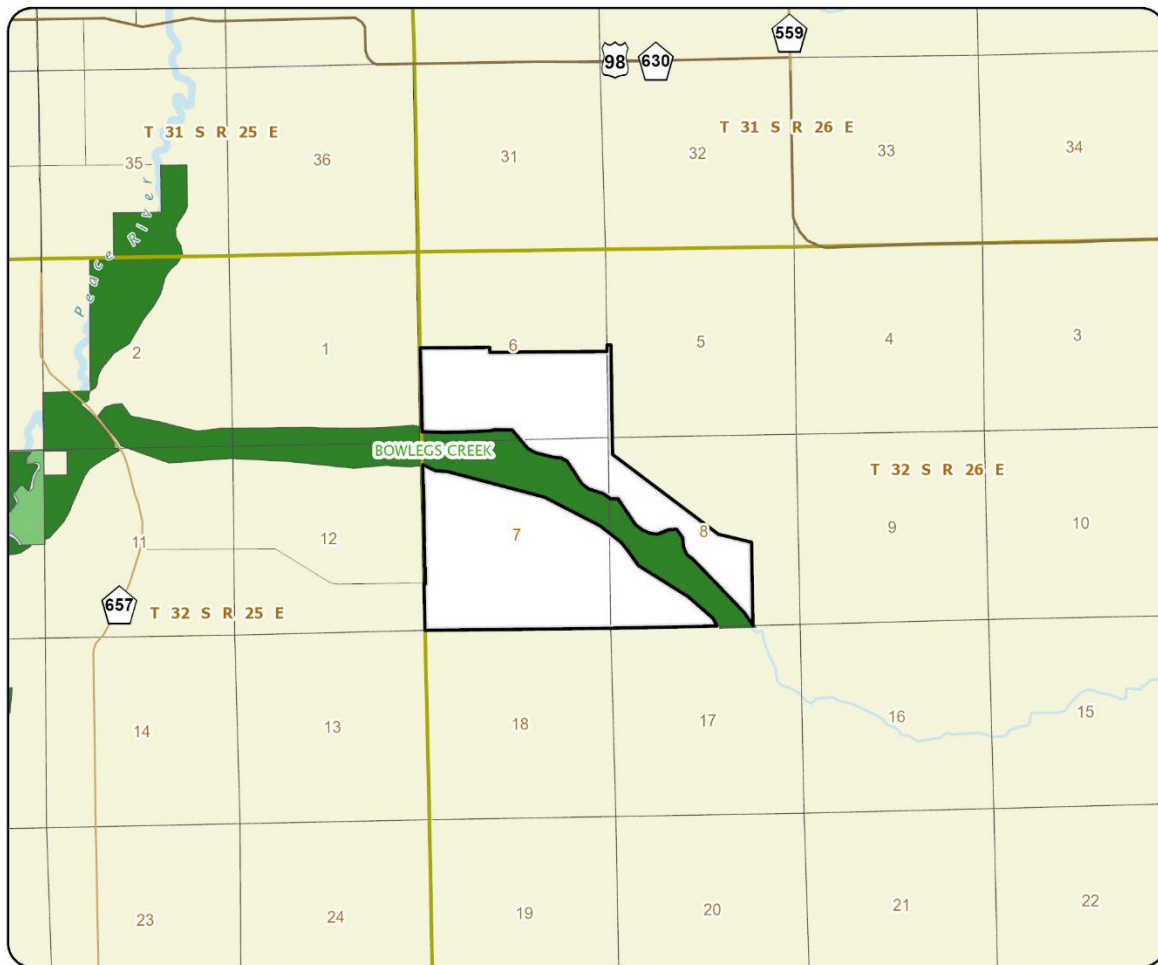
Manager

If acquired as less-than-fee, management of the Bowlegs Creek Watershed project would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management to confirm compliance with the conditions of the conservation easement would be coordinated by the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Division of State Lands.

Management Prospectus

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of the Bowlegs Creek Watershed would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring to confirm continued conservation easement compliance would be coordinated by DEP's Division of State Lands.





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