

# Fair Bluff

Less-Than-Fee

Martin County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	<i>2024</i>
<i>Project Acres</i>	<i>639</i>
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	<i>639</i>
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	<i>\$3,891,080</i>

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Fair Bluff project will expand ecological greenways in the Florida Wildlife Corridor on the east side of Lake Okeechobee. The project will also aid in the ongoing Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) by helping to increase the water storage capacity of Lake Okeechobee and protect water quality of the Greater Everglades Watershed at both a local and regional scale.

## General Description

The Fair Bluff project contains one parcel owned by a single landowner, totaling 639 acres, 12 miles east of the town of Okeechobee. The property is adjacent to the southern border of the Walpole Ranch agricultural and conservation easement (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services), which itself is contiguous with a corridor of conservation lands including Bluefield Ranch Mitigation Bank and Bluefield Ranch (St. Lucie County). This project is within the Taylor Creek/Nubbin Slough Basin area of the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project, a component of CERP designed to improve the water quantity of Lake Okeechobee. Currently, the property is used for cattle ranching (40 cow/calf pairs), hunting and recreation.

Water flows across this essentially flat property from the northeast to the southwest via a ditch following a natural flow-way through a series of wetlands that form the headwaters of an unnamed tributary of Lettuce Creek, which flows into Lake Okeechobee approximately 3 miles from the property.

Uplands comprise the majority (83%) of the property, dominated by mesic hammock (35%) and mesic flatwoods (22%). The current coverage of mesic hammock has expanded as former mesic flatwoods have undergone succession due to an absence of fire. Mesic flatwoods on the subject property are highly variable in species composition, corresponding with the recency and frequency of fire or other disturbance.

Wetlands comprise a minority (17%) of the site. Marshes appear to have been managed for grazing by mowing, and the species composition of the marshes is variable depending on the intensity of cattle grazing. Semi-improved pasture occupies approximately 14% of the property and improved pasture occupies a lesser (12%) extent of the property. Successional hydric shrubland/forest occupies natural



wetlands that have undergone historic harvest or hydrological disturbances and have since been left to natural succession. Invasive plant cover is moderately low on the property and is actively being managed by the landowner using a combination of chemical and mechanical methods.

A number of listed species have been documented on the property including gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) and redmargin zephyrlily (*Zephyranthes simpsonii*). Several active gopher tortoise burrows were observed during the site visit.

#### FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
redmargin zephyrlily	G2G3/S2S3

#### Public Use

The Fair Bluff 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 Fair Bluff project to the 2025 Florida Forever Priority List.

#### Management Policy Statement

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

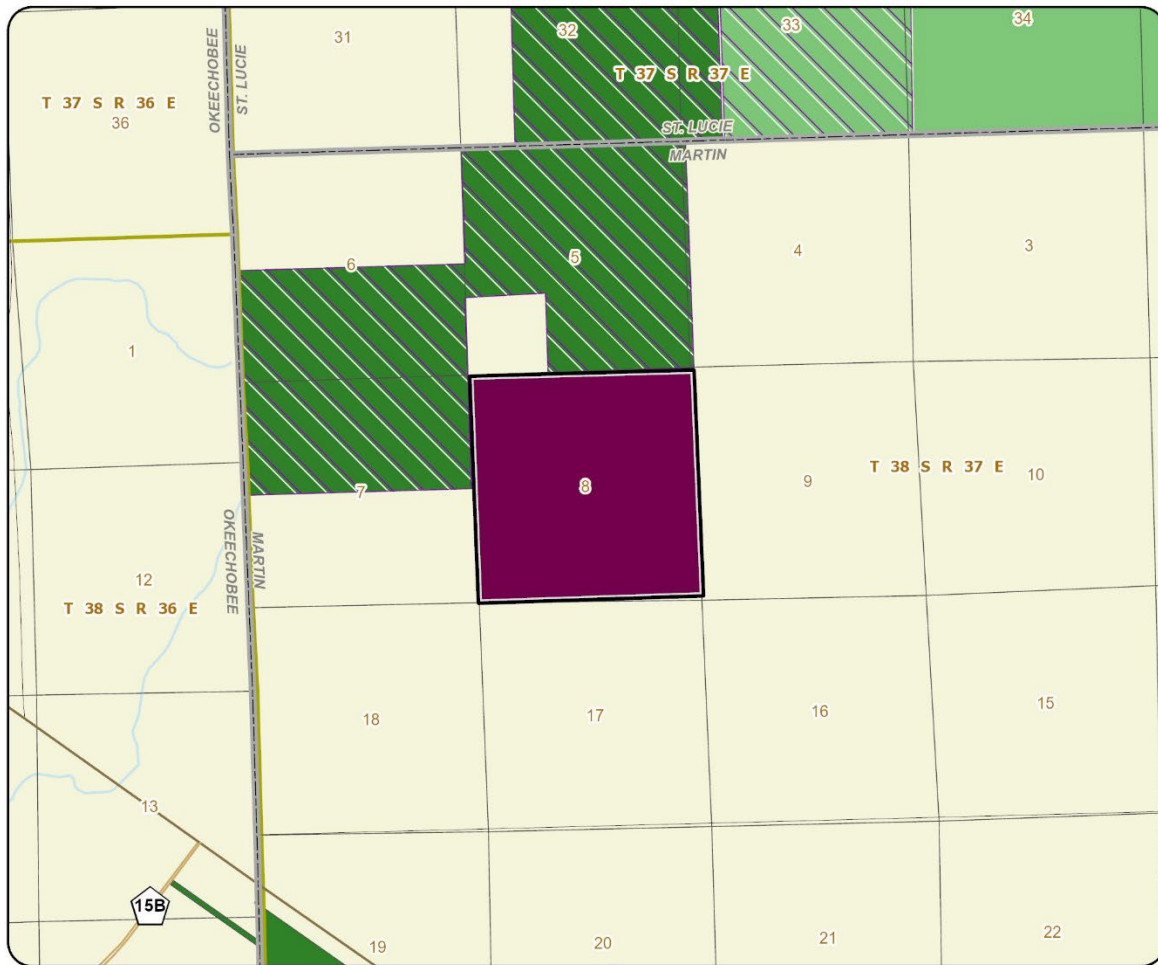
#### Manager

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of the Fair Bluff 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

DEP's Division of State Lands will periodically monitor the conservation easement, while the management will be conducted by the property owner.





## FAIR BLUFF

### MARTIN COUNTY

