

Lettuce Creek Cattle Company

Less-Than-Fee

Highlands County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	<i>2024</i>
<i>Project Acres</i>	<i>377</i>
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	<i>377</i>
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	<i>\$2,461,103</i>

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Lettuce Creek Cattle Company project will contribute to the protection of water resources within the Yellow Bluff Creek floodplain draining into Lake Istokpoga. The project will also protect rare natural communities and enhance ecological connectivity for a variety of imperiled wildlife species including the Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*). Additionally, the project will support military missions of nearby Avon Park Air Force Range by preventing incompatible development by reducing encroachment on sensitive conservation lands.

General Description

The Lettuce Creek Cattle Company project is a nearly square tract of approximately 377 acres under one ownership, less than two miles west of Lake Istokpoga. The project's southern boundary abuts an unacquired portion of the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Florida Forever project, which itself connects to other public and private conservation lands to the southeast. The project is within the Florida Wildlife Corridor and the Avon Park Air Force Range Sentinel Landscape.

The project is situated on the eastern edge of the Lake Wales Ridge, where the high, sandy ridge gives way to the Osceola Plain to the east. Yellow Bluff Creek enters the tract from the north and flows southeastward, where it converges with Josephine Creek a quarter mile east of the project.

The most widespread natural community on site is baygall (46%), which dominates the large wetland area in the eastern portion of the property. Scrub makes up about 12% of the tract, in a single area on the western edge of the property. Although somewhat overgrown from a lack of fire and evidence of grazing, the scrub community contains a diversity of herbs including Florida Alicia (*Chapmannia floridana*). Wet flatwoods also comprise 12% of the property, varying in composition and structure. Mesic flatwoods intergrade with wet flatwoods on higher elevations and are the predominant vegetation on the banks above Yellow Bluff Creek.





The property is mainly used for cattle ranching. Improved pasture makes up 20% of the property and semi-improved pasture comprises 5% of the property. Invasive species were observed in isolated areas during the time of the site visit.

Several active gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) burrows were observed during the site visit. The property's marshes and wetlands potentially support species of imperiled wading birds.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>scrub buckwheat</i>	G4T2?/S2
<i>cutthroatgrass</i>	G3/S3
<i>Florida jointweed</i>	G3/S3
<i>paper nailwort</i>	G3/S3

Public Use

The Lettuce Creek Cattle Company 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 Lettuce Creek Cattle Company project to the 2025 Florida Forever Priority List.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Lettuce Creek Cattle Company project would be managed by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

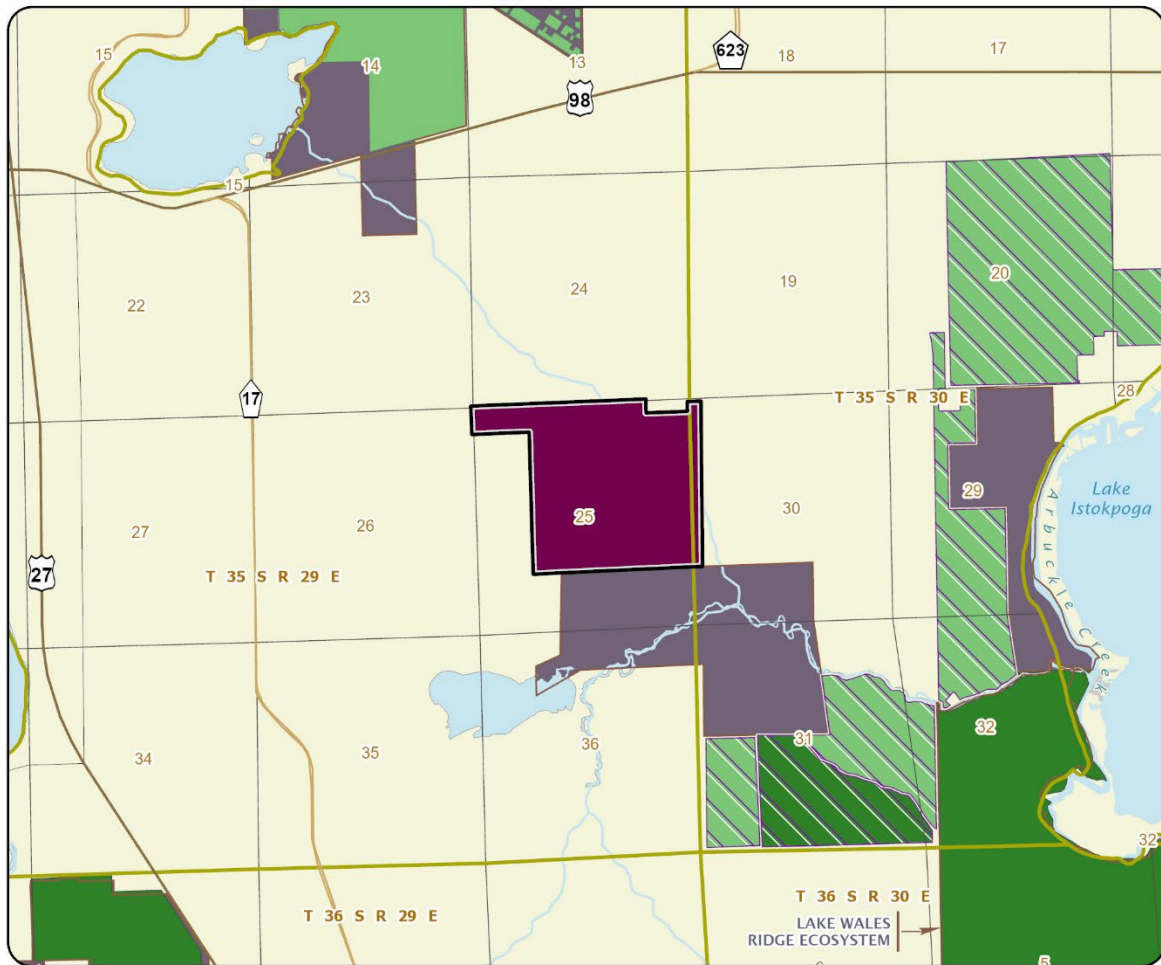
Manager(s)

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of the Lettuce Creek Cattle Company 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

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





LETTUCE CREEK CATTLE COMPANY

HIGHLANDS COUNTY

