

# Rainbow River Corridor

Partnerships and Regional Incentives

Citrus and Marion Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	<i>2007</i>
<i>Project Acres</i>	<i>1,231</i>
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	<i>331</i>
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	<i>900</i>
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	<i>\$11,216,051</i>

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Rainbow River Corridor project will protect most of the undeveloped or minimally developed private land remaining along the Rainbow River. The project's southern parcels will preserve a remaining large portion of undeveloped shoreline along the eastern side of the river and provide a connection to the southern end of the Rainbow Springs State Park. In addition, the potential restoration of altered habitats would help to restore and maintain water quality and habitat along one of Florida's largest spring-run streams. This project will increase biodiversity protection, preserve landscape linkages and conservation corridors, protect surface waters of the state, preserve aquifer recharge areas, and increase natural resource-based recreation opportunities by filling several land gaps between sections of Rainbow Springs State Park.

## General Description

Rainbow River, a large spring-run stream, is a state-designated aquatic preserve and Outstanding Florida Water that runs southward for approximately six miles before entering the Withlacoochee River at Dunnellon. Rainbow Springs State Park encompasses the river's headwaters, much of the northern portion of the river and a first magnitude spring (considered Florida's fourth largest). Rainbow River is one of the longest spring runs in the world and represents a rare and unique natural resource worldwide.

The Marjorie Harris Cross Florida Greenway State Recreation and Conservation Area (MHCCFG) adjoins a short stretch of the river at Dunnellon, then extends eastward to include a 0.75-mile common boundary inland with the state park; it also includes a tract on the western side of the river but with only two very narrow connections with the river itself. Two of the main goals of acquiring these land parcels are to fill the gaps in existing public lands, Rainbow Springs State Park and MHCCFG, that are adjacent to the proposed properties and to provide added protection to this river and the ecosystem that it supports. The Rainbow River Corridor project would connect the current northern and southern parcels of the park, providing a more contiguous system of natural areas by creating an intact corridor between



conservation lands. It would also provide added protection for the river by safeguarding the remaining undeveloped lands in the already significantly altered waterway.

The Rainbow River Corridor project encompasses several disjunct tracts lying to the north of as well as along both eastern and western sides of the river. Nearly all tracts (but not necessarily all ownerships) are contiguous with public lands. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has calculated the river frontage as encompassing 15,935 feet.

#### FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<b><u>FNAI Elements</u></b>	<b><u>Score</u></b>
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Eastern diamondback rattlesnake	G3/S3
Suwannee cooter	G5T3/S3

#### Public Use

Much of the project is identified for full-fee acquisition adjacent to the state park, which will provide public access across the acquired parcel for various recreational opportunities currently offered within the park. Potential recreation would include hiking, biking and picnicking. The river frontage could also be used as a rest stop for canoeists, kayakers and tubers. The southern triangular 47-acre parcel is heavily forested and has several wetland areas. This property is currently used as the Rainbow River Club and includes several buildings including a clubhouse, cabins, boating and cookout facilities. The acquisition and use of the facilities could be continued as park lodging, administration, park residence and low-impact recreation such as hiking, birdwatching, kayaking and education if the membership of the current club is dissolved. The northwest, 374-acre parcel would help protect the headsprings recharge area and could provide a suitable site for future park development. The 110-acre Priest parcel is a wetland area and would be limited to passive activities such as hiking, bird watching and kayaking.

#### Acquisition Planning

##### **2007**

On June 15, 2007, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) added the Rainbow River Corridor project to Group A of the Florida Forever Priority List. This full-fee project was sponsored by the Rainbow River Conservation, incorporated as RRC, Inc., in a proposal submitted on December 30, 2006. It is approximately 1,183 acres and has an assessed taxable value of \$1,157,483.

##### **2008**

On March 28, 2008, the City of Dunnellon acquired 32.4 acres of this project for Blue Run of Dunnellon Park on the south side of Highway 484 (the Cunningham/Nelson Tuber Exit Property). Funds came from the City (\$320,000) and a grant from the Florida Communities Trust (FCT) (\$2,606,164). The City manages this site.

##### **2011**

On December 9, 2011, ARC placed this project in the Partnerships and Regional Incentives category.



**2017**

In 2017, a total of 5.09 acres in this project were acquired fee-simple using Florida Forever program funding.

**2021**

On June 11, 2021, ARC approved an addition of 47.78 acres in Marion County to the project boundary.

**2023**

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) acquired a 139-acre conservation easement in Charlotte County from Gissy Rainbow River Ranch, LLC.

**Coordination**

Rainbow River Conservation Inc. worked with The Trust for Public Land and applied to FCT to acquire the Cunningham/Nelson Tuber Exit Property. DEP's Division of State Lands has been pursuing a portion of this area that is within the park's optimum boundary on behalf of DEP's Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP).

**Management Policy Statement**

DRP will manage its property under a single-use concept as part of Rainbow Springs State Park and MHCCFG. The primary objective of management of the Rainbow River Corridor project is to preserve the water quality of the Rainbow and Withlacoochee Rivers and Rainbow Springs by protecting the land above the underground conduits that supply the spring and providing and ensuring that the resource-based outdoor recreational opportunities of the park will continue to be enjoyed by the public. Precluding major residential and commercial development along the river will assist efforts to preserve water quality and wildlife habitat in this fast-developing region.

**Manager(s)**

The property is to be managed by DRP. DRP notes that much of this is a full-fee acquisition adjacent to the park, and public access will be provided across the acquired parcel for varied natural resource recreation currently offered within the state park.

**Management Prospectus****Qualifications for State Designation**

The project will be included in the management of Rainbow Springs State Park. The site can be used for a variety of compatible resource-based outdoor recreational activities. As part of Rainbow Springs State Park, hunting would not be permitted. Public use of the cabins and recreational facility on the southern parcel may be continued. The site can be utilized for a variety of compatible resource-based outdoor recreational activities. As part of MHCCFG, hunting would not be permitted.

**Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management**

The Rainbow River Corridor project will be a high-need management area with an emphasis on perpetuation of the property's resources, particularly as related to the Withlacoochee and Rainbow





Rivers, Rainbow Springs, and compatible resource-based recreation. An evaluation of the condition of existing structures will need to be completed. Public use of existing structures, such as those existing on the southern parcel, and the addition of any other infrastructure for the lands added to the park will increase the intensity of management. Restoration would require an intensity of management as dictated by study of the site.

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

Vehicular access by the public will be confined to designated points and routes. Emphasis will be given to the protection of water quality of adjacent rivers and springs. Resource management activities in the first year of each fee title acquisition will concentrate on site security and development of a resource inventory. Long-term management may include a wide range of resource-based recreation and associated facilities. The integration of appropriate public uses will create a recreational linkage between Rainbow Springs State Park and MHCCFG.

### **Revenue-generating Potential**

DRP expects no significant revenue from this property immediately after fee title acquisition. The amount of future revenue will depend on the nature and extent of public use and the facilities existing or developed in the future.

### **Cooperators in Management Activities**

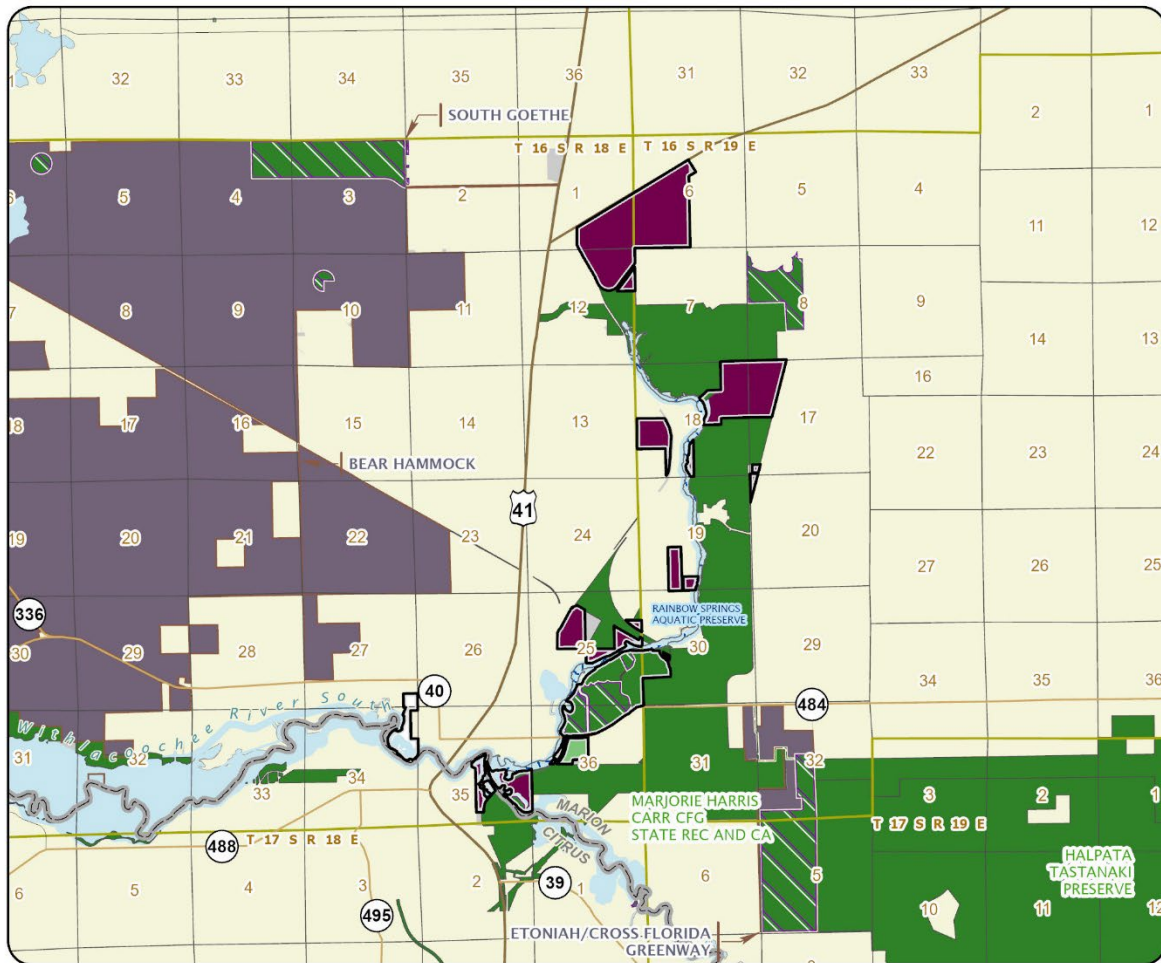
DRP will cooperate with local governments, other state agencies and the Southwest Florida Water Management District to further resource management, recreational and educational opportunities, and the development of the lands for state park and greenway purposes.

#### **Management Cost Summary**

<u>DRP</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Salary	\$0	not provided
OPS	\$45,000	not provided
Expense	\$10,000	not provided
OCO	\$46,000	not provided
FCO	\$10,000	not provided
TOTAL	\$111,000	not provided

*Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted by the DRP and OGT*





## RAINBOW RIVER CORRIDOR

### CITRUS AND MARION COUNTIES

