

Red Hills Conservation

Less-Than-Fee

Jefferson and Leon Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2019
<i>Project Acres</i>	18,089
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	9,000
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	9,089
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$48,094,474

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Red Hills Conservation project will increase the protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community and landscape levels through the protection, restoration and maintenance of the uplands and wetlands of the Red Hills region. The project will also increase the amount of forestland available for sustainable management of natural resources and will preserve significant archaeological and historic sites.

General Description

The Red Hills Conservation project originally included lands in three plantations: Cherokee Plantation, Ring Oak Plantation and Norias Hunt Club. In western Leon County, the 5,536-acre Cherokee Plantation extends from Lake Iamonia eastward to Old Centerville Road. Also in Leon County, the 5,322-acre Ring Oak Plantation is located east of State Road 59, adjacent to the town of Miccosukee, and the entire eastern border of the property is the shore of Lake Miccosukee. Lastly, located in both Leon and Jefferson counties, the 5,976-acre Norias Hunt Club (owned by Gem Land Company) is just north of the town of Miccosukee, and a portion of the property's western border also touches the shore of Lake Miccosukee. Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy manages many of the existing conservation lands surrounding the project boundary.

The project is within an area commonly termed the Red Hills region; properties within the project are generally characterized by rolling, moderately well-drained uplands with clay soils overlain by loamy sands, isolated lakes and depressional wetlands. Upland vegetation primarily resembles the upland pine natural community, although much of this was altered historically to support agriculture (primarily cotton). The upland pine, now growing on former old fields, generally supports a flora lacking some key native components, including wiregrass. Although longleaf pine historically dominated the canopy, these sites are now dominated by loblolly, shortleaf and slash pine, with occasional small pockets of mature longleaf pine. There are numerous agricultural food plots and a grid of chopped or mowed lanes to aid hunting activities within these open canopied pinelands. The pinelands are generally managed with chopping, mowing and prescribed fire.





FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
<i>Miccosukee gooseberry</i>	G1/S1
Red-cockaded woodpecker	G3/S2
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>smooth hedgenettle</i>	G5/S1
<i>Turk's cap lily</i>	G5/S1
Bachman's sparrow	G3/S3
Bald eagle	G5/S3
Southeastern fox squirrel	G5T5/S3
Little blue heron	G5/S4
White ibis	G5/S4

Public Use

The Red Hills Conservation project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access. However, the Tallahassee Astronomical Society supports the acquisition of the Red Hills Conservation project because its continued operation as plantation protects the area from light pollution that comes with residential and commercial development.

The landowner has demonstrated a willingness to ensure public access to Lake Miccosukee by selling land to Leon County to create Cypress Landing and by allowing the public to use its road to access Hopkins Landing. There are several existing conservation easements surrounding these lakes and this project would fill gaps in resource protection in an area of Leon County with high development pressure.

Acquisition Planning

2019

On April 2, 2019, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) voted to add this project to the Less-than-Fee category on the Florida Forever Priority List.

2022

On April 8, 2022, ARC approved the 945-acre Foshalee Slough project proposal and combined it with the Red Hills Conservation project.

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) acquired a conservation easement totaling 4,101.78 acres in Jefferson and Leon counties from Gem Land Company.

2024

On February 13, 2024, DEP acquired a 4,777.23-acre conservation easement in Leon County from Gem Land Company.

In December 2024, ARC voted to add five parcels totaling approximately 214.39 acres in Leon County.





Coordination

Establishing the property as a conservation easement would help achieve objectives in the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Gopher Tortoise Management Plan that pertain to increasing the amount of protected tortoise habitat on private lands.

Management Policy Statement

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

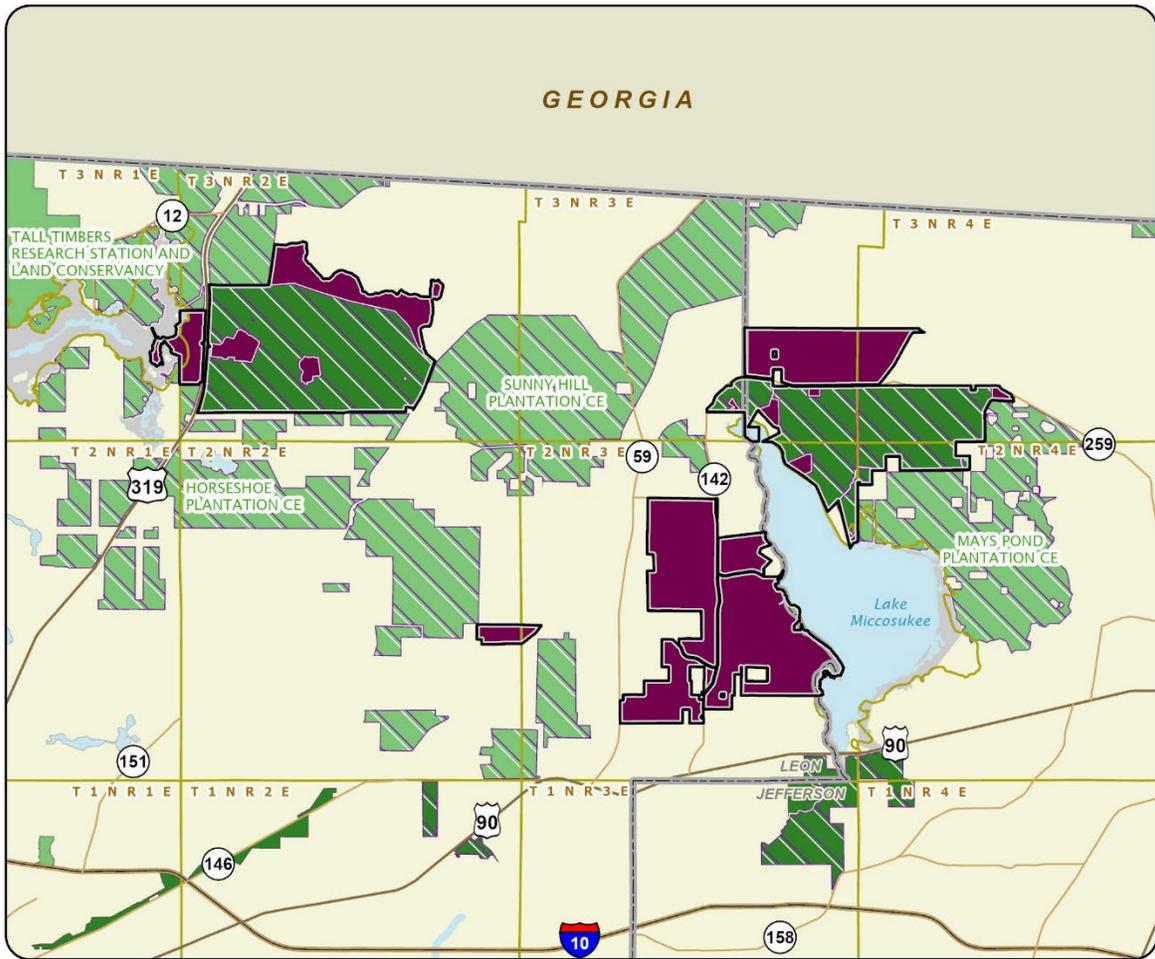
Manager(s)

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of the Red Hills Conservation area would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management to confirm continued conservation easement would be coordinated by DEP's 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.





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