

Suwannee County Preservation

Less-Than-Fee

Suwannee County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2010
<i>Project Acres</i>	1,254
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	1,254
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$5,151,338

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Suwannee County Preservation project will protect the water quality of the Suwannee River basin, provide continued protection of Rocky Creek and provide long-term benefits to imperiled wildlife such as the Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*).

General Description

Located in northeastern Suwannee County, just east of Live Oak, lies the Suwannee County Preservation project. The project is in two primary locations: one parcel on the Suwannee River and a cluster of parcels east of Live Oak on both sides of Interstate 10. Rocky Creek (a perennial stream) crosses two parcels in the larger tract, flowing north before its confluence with the Suwannee River. The last stretch of Rocky Creek crosses through the Suwannee River Water Management District's Rocky Creek tract, which adjoins the Suwannee River. The eastern tracts consist of disturbed uplands and naturally-vegetated bottomland along the Rocky Creek system, which flows northward through the property on its way to the Suwannee River. Most of the better-drained uplands have been converted to pine plantation or have been timbered.

The 139-acre River Tract on the Suwannee River is undeveloped, except for a decrepit shed, a cement boat ramp covered with sediment, and the existence of electrical power and a well. Rising abruptly from the Suwannee River's eastern bank is a natural levee, behind which is a broader band of bottomland forest supporting a variety of hardwoods. Inland of this, the upland portion of the tract - about 99 acres - is mostly pine plantation.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Suwannee alligator snapping turtle	G2/S2





Public Use

The Suwannee County Preservation project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access. However, the landowners indicated they could be willing to sell their property in fee simple.

If acquired fee-simple, the eastern tract bisected by Interstate 10 could provide many trail opportunities for hiking, off-road biking, horseback riding, nature/interpretive and off-highway vehicle riding. The tract located on the Suwannee River could also provide freshwater boating, fishing, canoeing and kayaking opportunities.

Acquisition Planning

2010

On June 11, 2010, the Acquisition and Restoration Council added the Suwannee County Preservation project to the Less-Than-Fee category of the Florida Forever Priority List. In 2010, the project had an estimated tax-assessed value of \$2,995,178.

Coordination

No acquisition partners have been identified.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Suwannee County Preservation 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 Suwannee County Preservation project would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management to confirm continued conservation easement compliance would 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.

Qualifications for State Designation

Acquiring the Suwannee County Preservation project fulfills the Florida Forever goals of acquiring conservation land by other than fee-simple purchase; acquiring significant, strategic habitat conservation areas; protecting floodplains in the Rocky Creek and the Suwannee River areas; and protecting the surface waters of the state.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

Disturbed acreage includes pine plantation and associated facilities, power line rights-of-way, roads and ruderal sites, some of which now support successional hardwood forest and row crops. Despite the high level of disturbance to uplands throughout the site, no exotic species were observed. Restoration of natural habitat would be extensive and prolonged due to the current land use. The small size and





proximity of the tract to Interstate 10 excludes the use of prescribed fire as a habitat management tool. The Florida Natural Areas Inventory notes that the upland pine (sandhill or upland pine forest) natural community (and perhaps some mesic flatwoods) has been all but eliminated by silviculture and fire exclusion. Restoration to historic conditions would require the removal of off-site pine, replanting with longleaf pine and attempting to restore native groundcover and shrubby vegetation by seeding or planting. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission notes that substantial and prolonged habitat restoration would be necessary for the area to become beneficial to a more diverse variety of wildlife.





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