

Welles Ranch

Less-Than-Fee

Charlotte County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	<i>2023</i>
<i>Project Acres</i>	<i>1,183</i>
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	<i>1,183</i>
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	<i>\$5,076,899</i>

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Welles Ranch project will expand conservation lands in the rapidly growing Charlotte County and protect the sensitive species and habitats in southwest Florida. This project will also help protect the water quality of Shell Creek, which provides drinking water for the City of Punta Gorda and unincorporated parts of Charlotte County, along with Prairie Creek.

General Description

The Welles Ranch project contains 77 parcels, totaling 1,183 acres in Charlotte County. The western side of the property shares its boundary with the Hall Ranch Florida Forever project and the southeast corner is near the Babcock Ranch Preserve.

This property lies within the Florida Panther Focus Area and the Florida Wildlife Corridor. The predominant natural communities found on Welles Ranch include dome swamps, mesic flatwoods, and mesic hammock. The Florida Forever Measures Evaluation reports that 100% of this property has been identified as a habitat for several rare species including the red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*), Florida long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*) and Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*).

Welles Ranch features one mile of Shell Creek on the property. Shell Creek, along with Prairie Creek, provides approximately 8 million gallons of potable water to the thousands of residents in Punta Gorda. Acquisition of Welles Ranch helps to secure the quality and quantity of water for Charlotte County. As such, the property (100%) contributes to both aquifer recharge and surface water protection, according to the Florida Forever Measures Evaluation.

Welles Ranch is a working cattle ranch with a majority of the property being made up of improved and semi-improved pasture. Northern portions of Welles Ranch have been historically managed as a quail preserve with mesic flatwoods dominated by longleaf pine. The property is also used for recreational hunting. There are two cabins and a cattle barn for recreation and farming practices, respectively. The landowner is working to acquire the multiple inholdings within the project boundary prior to pursuing a conservation easement with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).





FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Swallow-tailed kite	G5/S2

Public Use

The Welles Ranch project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access. Due to the lack of public access, there will not be any public resource-based outdoor recreation potential for the project.

Acquisition Planning

2023

On October 13, 2023, the Acquisition and Restoration Council voted to add the Welles Ranch project to the Less-Than-Fee category of the 2024 Florida Forever Priority List.

Coordination

There are no identified partners in this project.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Welles Ranch project would be managed for conservation purposes by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

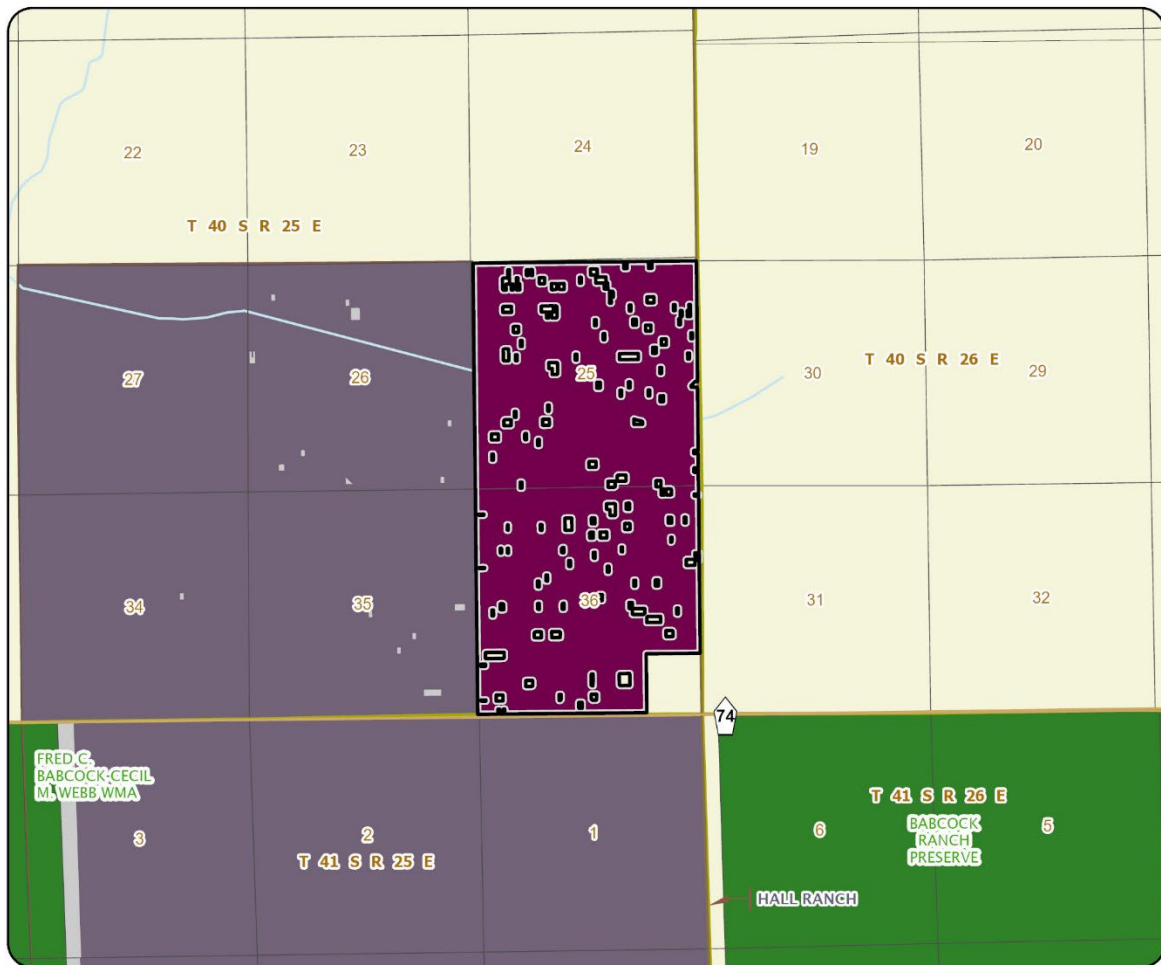
Manager

If acquired as less-than-fee, management of the Welles Ranch project would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management to confirm continued compliance with the conditions of the 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.





WELLES RANCH

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

