

# Apalachicola River

Critical Natural Lands

Calhoun, Gadsden, Gulf, Jackson and Liberty Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	<i>1991</i>
<i>Project Acres</i>	<i>77,993</i>
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	<i>9,625</i>
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	<i>68,367</i>
<i>2025 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	<i>\$101,768,878</i>

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Apalachicola River project will protect the water quality of the river, preserve the productive and unique habitat of Apalachicola Bay and provide the public with scenic outdoor recreation opportunities from Torreya State Park south to Wewahitchka and Dead Lakes. The project will protect much of Florida's remaining upland glades natural community that is not already located within state-owned conservation lands. The project's rare plant community supports 16 endemic plant species and occurs nowhere else in Florida. The high plateaus, steep bluffs and deep ravines of the northern Apalachicola River valley are some of the most significant natural features of the southeastern Coastal Plain and the region is home to many rare and endemic plants and animals, such as the endangered and nearly extinct Florida Torreya tree (*Torreya taxifolia*).

## General Description

The project consists of an upper and lower section along the Apalachicola River. The upper section on the east side of the Apalachicola River includes a large tract on the east bank, running south from near Chattahoochee to Torreya State Park, including rich upland and floodplain forests and most of the upland glades in the state. It shelters several rare plants such as the Florida Torreya tree. The Land property, west of the former area, contains floodplain forest important for southeastern bat (*Myotis austroriparius*) and gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*). The tract is part of the Southeastern Bat Maternity Caves Florida Forever project. The Sweetwater Creek tract connects Torreya State Park with The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Apalachicola Bluffs and Ravines Preserve and includes some of the deepest steephead ravines in the state, with unique hardwood forests harboring many rare plants and animals. The uplands between the steepheads are a sand pine plantation that can be restored to longleaf pine.





The lower western section, located mostly south of State Road 20, is owned by a single landowner and includes approximately 44,000 acres of floodplain and bottomland forest with some areas of uplands. These lands along the Apalachicola River have a high potential for discovery of archaeological sites not yet documented by the Department of State’s Division of Historical Resources. All these areas are threatened by timbering and unrestricted vehicular access. The Teal Timber addition lies mainly within the lower section, though the northern tract is within the upper section.

Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) Element Occurrence Summary

<b><u>FNAI Elements</u></b>	<b><u>Score</u></b>
<i>Florida torreya*</i>	G1/S1
Reticulated flatwoods salamander	G1/S1
Eastern indigo snake	G2G3/S2?
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>Apalachicola rosemary*</i>	G1/S1
Fat threeridge	G1/S1
Chipola slabshell	G1/S1
<i>Gholson's blazing star*</i>	G1/S1
<i>Pinewoods aster*</i>	G1?/S1?
Southern elktoe	G1/S1
Torreya pygmy grasshopper	G1/S1
<i>*Plant species are in italics</i>	

**Public Use**

The Apalachicola River project is proposed for both fee and less-than-fee acquisition. In either acquisition scenario, the project will provide habitat for wildlife including the Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*) and buffers other conservation lands such as the St. Joe Timberland project and the Southeastern Maternity Bat Caves project. Forestry uses could continue under a well-crafted forest stewardship management plan. Portions of the project purchased in fee simple would be managed as state parks or preserves, wildlife management areas or state forests, and allow such uses as hiking, nature appreciation, limited hunting and fishing and boat launching. Acquisition would also help complete the Florida National Scenic Trail, a statewide non-motorized trail that crosses several Florida Forever project sites. The trail is a congressionally designated national scenic trail.

**Acquisition Planning**

**1990**

On December 7, 1990, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council separated the Apalachicola River and Bay Conservation and Recreational Lands (CARL) project into two projects: Apalachicola Bay





and Apalachicola River, Phase I. The Apalachicola River, Phase I project included the Aspalaga Landing tract (800 acres/two owners), Atkins tract (3,210 acres/seven owners) and Gadsden County Glades (1,912 acres/13 owners) and had an estimated tax value of \$4,532,300.

## **1992**

On April 7, 1992, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved a 4,570-acre addition to the project boundary. It consisted of 30 owners and a taxable value of \$1,813,157.

## **1995**

On July 14, 1995, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved a 374-acre addition (Land property) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by the owner and had a taxable value of \$282,712. The tract is across from the Gadsden Glades tract and nearly adjacent to the Sneads Cave site of the Southeastern Bat Maternity Caves project.

## **1996**

On December 5, 1996, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council transferred the Atkins/Trammell tract (approximately 3,210 acres) and the Hatcher tract (approximately 544 acres within the 9,145-acre Sweetwater site) to the Less-than-Fee category. A 613-acre conservation easement was acquired on the Hatcher tract in 2002.

## **1999**

On May 6, 1999, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council designated an additional 11,800 acres (Lake Wimico) as essential.

On December 9, 1999, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council removed lands owned by The St. Joe Company in Gadsden Glades (360 acres), Aspalaga Landing (600 acres) and Sweetwater Creek (7,040 acres) and placed them in the St. Joe Timberland CARL project.

## **2001**

On April 6, 2001, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) removed the Atkins/Trammell tract site (approximately 3,210 acres) from the project because the resources had been compromised and negotiations had reached an impasse.

## **2002**

On April 25, 2002, ARC approved a less-than-fee, 2,242-acre addition (Corbin/Tucker site) to the project boundary. The addition was sponsored by TNC and consisted of two owners, David Corbin and Ken Tucker, with a taxable value of \$1,106,820.

On August 15, 2002, ARC approved a less-than-fee, 1,514-acre addition of the Trammel tract (that was previously part of the 3,210-acre Atkins/Trammell tract that was removed on April 6,





2001) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Trammel, and had a taxable value of \$430,000.

### **2003**

On February 7, 2003, ARC approved a fee-simple and less-than-fee 3,113-acre addition to the project boundary. Sponsored by TNC, the addition consisted of four landowners, five tracts and had a taxable value of \$764,996. The tracts break down as follows: Soterra Crooked Creek tract, Soterra Connector tract, Thompson tract, Hatcher tract and TNC Dupuis/Traveler's tract.

On October 17, 2003, ARC approved a less-than-fee, 1,244-acre addition (Glenn Summers tract) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by the owner, Glenn Summers, and had a taxable value of \$91,645.

### **2007**

On December 23, 2007, the Northwest Florida Water Management District purchased a 1,544-acre conservation easement from Robert D./Kay S. Trammell and Robert Douglas Trammell and Meredith Trammell Roop for \$2,985,108. The easement is known as the Trammell tract.

### **2010**

On September 30, 2010, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) purchased 553 acres, known as Torreya State Park Addition, for \$1,418,000 from Plum Creek. DRP will manage the addition.

### **2011**

On December 9, 2011, ARC placed the project under Florida Forever's Critical Natural Lands category.

### **2017**

In 2017, The Forestland Group proposed a less-than-fee project of more than 37,000 acres in the upper Apalachicola River. Approximately 700 acres of the Skyland Ranch tract was also added, proposed for fee simple acquisition. The proposal totaled 37,895 acres and had a tax-assessed value of \$5,756,412. In October 2017, ARC approved this as a stand-alone project, naming it the Upper Apalachicola River Ecosystem Florida Forever project.

In December 2017, ARC moved to combine the newly approved Upper Apalachicola River Ecosystem project into the boundary of the existing Apalachicola River project.

In 2017, 288.26 acres in the project were acquired using Florida Forever program funding.





## 2020

On August 21, 2020, ARC approved an addition of 347 acres to the project boundary adjacent to the Apalachicola River Wildlife and Environmental Area in Gulf County.

## 2021

In 2021, DEP's Division of State Lands was awarded a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund for \$31 million to acquire, in fee, approximately 32,000 acres within the project. Additional funds were awarded to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to assist with start-up management of the land once acquired.

## 2023

On June 9, 2023, ARC approved the addition of seven parcels totaling 424 acres to the project boundary adjacent to the Apalachicola River Wildlife and Environmental Area in Calhoun County.

On October 13, 2023, ARC approved the addition of five parcels totaling 665 acres to the project boundary in Jackson County.

DEP acquired, in fee, 758.5 acres in Liberty County from TNC.

## 2025

On April 11, 2025, ARC approved the addition of the Teal Timber project (18,553 acres) in Calhoun, Gulf and Liberty counties to the project boundary.

In June 2025, ARC approved the addition of one parcel totaling approximately 179 acres in Jackson County and four parcels totaling approximately 476 acres in Gadsden County to the project boundary.

On July 23, 2025, DEP acquired a 423.4-acre conservation easement in Jackson County from Keene Farm Trust and a 141-acre conservation easement in Jackson County from J Neil Keene.

In August 2025, ARC approved the addition of 533 acres as a part of the St. Joe Timberland project reorganization effort.

### Management Policy Statement

The primary management goals of the Apalachicola River project are to conserve the rich bluffs and ravines along the upper Apalachicola River which are unique in North America and provide important habitat for many rare plants and animals; to conserve and restore these important ecosystems and their plant and animal resources; to provide areas for natural resource-based recreation; and to preserve several significant archaeological sites. The project should be managed under the single-use concept, with management activities being directed toward the preservation of steephead streams, hardwood forests, glades and archaeological sites, the





removal of pine plantations and the restoration of natural pine forests. When complete, the project will include most of the bluffs and ravines in private ownership and will connect Torreya State Park, TNC's Apalachicola Bluffs and Ravine Preserve, Apalachicola River Wildlife and Environmental Area, Apalachicola River Water Management Area and Apalachicola National Forest. Protection of the ecosystem will also help conserve Apalachicola Bay and the Gulf of America. It has the appropriate size and location to achieve landscape-scale management goals.

### Manager(s)

If acquired fee simple, the lower and middle sections of the project would be managed by FWC as part of the Apalachicola River Wildlife and Environmental Area, while the upper section (north of State Road 20) would be managed by DRP as part of Torreya State Park. The portions of the project near the Torreya State Park and east of the Apalachicola River will be high-need management areas with an emphasis on public recreational use and development compatible with resource protection and management. During an initial 10-year pine restoration period, the Sweetwater Creek tract will be a low-need management area.

### Management Prospectus

#### **Purpose and Scope**

If acquired, DRP would manage the Teal Timber North Tract as a part of the Florida State Park System. Consistent with the purposes of the Florida Forever land acquisition program and the mission of the Florida Park Service, goals and objectives would include:

- Protection and improvement of remnant intact natural communities;
- Formation of continuous and bilateral wildlife corridors along the Apalachicola River watershed;
- Restoration of large areas of altered landcover; and
- Provision of outdoor resource-based recreation and interpretation opportunities along the western banks of the Apalachicola River to fulfill a public lands and recreation need and complement existing parklands located on the eastern banks of the Apalachicola River.

If acquired, FWC would manage Teal Timber South Tract as a part of the Wildlife Management Area (WMA) system to:

- Conserve, protect, manage or restore important ecosystems, landscapes and forests in order to enhance or protect significant surface water, recreational, timber, and fish and wildlife resources;





- Conserve and protect significant landscape-scale habitat and provide wildlife corridors for rare and imperiled species by increasing linkages and conservation corridors between public land and private conservation easements in the region;
- Provide surface and groundwater protection and protect natural floodplain functions; and
- Provide opportunities for fish and wildlife-focused public outdoor recreation.

### **Qualifications for State Designation**

Florida state parks must represent aspects of Florida's natural landscape and cultural inheritance. Additionally, a broad goal of DRP is to extend parklands equitably across the state of Florida wherever the natural and cultural resources are of statewide significance. The Teal Timber North Tract offers both significant natural characteristics and opportunity for substantial public access where parklands are currently lacking. The landscape is comprised of nearly a half mile of frontage along the Apalachicola River, floodplain swamps/alluvial forest and pronounced upland topography, which — in conjunction with potential acquisition of adjacent lands — could be experienced by hiking, riding and paddling.

The North Tract would also complement Torreya State Park, a large portion of which is located due east across the Apalachicola River. Accordingly, the viewshed from the high bluff where the Gregory House is located would be perpetually protected. It is also important to note that the North Tract encompasses Ocheese Landing where the Gregory House originally stood before relocation by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1935.

The Teal Timber South Tract (FWC) would be established as a part of the WMA system and would further FWC's mission to manage fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people by protecting habitat for fish and wildlife species, including imperiled and rare species, within the biologically diverse Apalachicola River Basin, and by providing the public with a variety of fish and wildlife-focused recreation opportunities.

### **Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management**

The unique and sensitive forests, glades and streams on the east side of the Apalachicola River qualify these lands as wildlife management areas, state forests, parks and preserves. The Atkins tract on the west side of the river has the size and wildlife resources to qualify as a wildlife management area.

The Teal Timber North Tract (DRP) is in silvicultural condition with extensive loblolly and slash pine rows, areas of clear-cutting, ground disturbance and long-term fire exclusion. Although wiregrass and longleaf occur sporadically throughout the uplands, groundcover is lacking.





Evidence of bedding and some ditching is visible. Few invasives were observed at the time of the site visit, but at least some areas of infestation are anticipated.

If acquired, extensive upland restoration would be required to bring the landscape into park-quality condition. Comparable restoration projects have been undertaken by DRP throughout Northwest Florida, such that DRP may be well prepared for this type of analysis and implementation logistics. Funding and staffing, however, may present a challenge and may require further analysis. Restoration objectives would be outlined in a unit management plan, plausibly including actions such as mechanical removal/thinning of pine and hardwood, regrading bedded terrain, reintroducing fire according to estimated return interval needs, invasive plant treatments and plantings of wiregrass and longleaf.

The Teal Timber South Tract (FWC) is typical of commercial pinelands excluded from fire. Groundcover is lacking in uplands due to dense pine stands and overgrown hardwood midstory. A large portion contains clearcuts with bedding. Additionally, the property contains invasive species and ditches. Due to the altered condition, restoration of natural communities will be a long-term process. Historic analysis of natural communities and vegetation types may be conducted, if deemed necessary, and quantified vegetation management objectives will be developed. The 10-year management plan will outline short-term and long-term actions for natural community restoration that will improve wildlife habitat. These actions may include flattening timber beds, removing hurricane debris piles, mechanical and chemical treatments of overgrown hardwoods, applying prescribed fire at intervals appropriate for each community type, treatment of invasive plant species, establishing longleaf pine and hydrological restoration.

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

Within the first year after acquisition, management activities will concentrate on site security, natural and cultural resource protection and efforts toward the development of a plan for long-term public use and resource management.

As to the Teal Timber North Tract (DRP), specific short-term and long-term objectives would be the product of a thorough resource management and land use planning process. Analogous experience and data from Torreya/Sweetwater and Bald Point/St. Teresa would be applied. Both planning and implementation would entail interagency cooperation. Land use planning would consider the existing facilities of nearby park units and gauge levels of demand for certain modes of recreation. During phases of intensive restoration, low-infrastructure and passive recreation would be necessary. The existing county road that terminates at Ocheese Landing may be utilized, at least initially, for the primary point of access to accessible upland trails and





the river. Considerable site analysis, however, would be needed to determine appropriate ingress/egress and road alignments. Some existing silvicultural roads that extend along uplands may provide long-term access, while other roads (especially any that traverse bottomlands) may be abandoned for hydrological/natural communities restoration. Fencing, gates and park boundary signage would be placed to guide appropriate access and for general security. No structures exist on the North Tract that require protection at this time.

Once the Teal Timber South Tract is leased to FWC, a management plan will be developed within one year that describes the management goals and objectives necessary to implement resource management programs. Goals will address general wildlife habitat management; imperiled species habitat restoration and management, or population restoration; species monitoring; invasive species management; public access and recreational opportunities; hydrological restoration; forest resource management; cultural resource protection; facilities and infrastructure; and partnerships or collaborative management opportunities. Short-term and long-term objectives will be developed to address these goals.

Essential roads will be maintained to provide public access and management operations. Unnecessary roads and hydrological disturbances will be abandoned or restored as practical. Infrastructure development will be limited to only that which is necessary to allow public access and to provide for the necessary facilities, security and management of the property.

### **Revenue-generating Potential**

No significant revenue is expected to be generated in the first several years, nor any significant facilities developed initially after the lands are placed under the management of DRP. The degree of future revenue generated will depend on the nature and extent of public use and facilities.

During early phases, timber removal on the Teal Timber North Tract (DRP) could generate revenue with potential for funding further restoration activities. Generating revenue from visitation, however, would mostly be achieved after considerable restoration progress and construction of substantial public access infrastructure. Depending on which forms and volumes of visitation are planned, eventual concession partnerships may also yield revenue.

Revenue on the Teal Timber South Tract (FWC) could include sales of various permits and recreational user fees, and ecotourism activities if such projects could be economically developed. Area regulations would be developed to identify the necessary and required permits, fees and regulations. Timber sales from thinning operations and restoration of off-site pine plantations may yield additional revenue. Apiary leases will be considered as a revenue source depending on whether the area meets the criteria of the FWC's Apiary Policy.





Additionally, acquisition would provide long-term values of ecosystem services to local and regional land and water resources and to human health.

**Potential Multiple-Use Activities**

If managed by DRP, multiple-use would not be applicable to the Teal Timber North Tract as DRP functions as a single-use land manager. Removal of pine and hardwood may generate revenue only for the purposes of ongoing habitat restoration at this site.

Following acquisition, FWC will consider implementing multiple fish and wildlife-focused recreational uses through the Commission approval process as needed and following planning considerations. The 10-year management plan will identify approved and conditional multiple-use activities that will provide access and compatible recreation while protecting the resources.

**Cooperators in Management Activities**

Consistent with analogous restoration projects at Torreya/Sweetwater and Bald Point/St. Teresa, DRP may coordinate restoration efforts with the Apalachicola Regional Stewardship Alliance (ARSA), established in 2003 by TNC. Specific partners under ARSA would likely include the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Additional partnerships might include Florida Forest Service (FFS), FWC and the Northwest Florida Water Management District.

FWC will cooperate with other agencies as needed to achieve management goals and objectives for the Teal Timber South Tract. Examples include cooperating with the Division of Historical Resources to ensure cultural resources are protected during management activities, FFS to provide technical assistance on forest resource management, Northwest Florida Water Management District and DEP for the monitoring and management of ground and surface water resources, and Gulf and Calhoun counties on road maintenance.

Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS</u>		<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	Conservation and Recreational Lands (CARL) Program		CARL
Salary		\$105,910	\$105,910
OPS		\$0	\$0
Expense		\$30,000	\$30,000
OCO		\$168,000	\$13,000
TOTAL		\$303,910	\$148,910

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





Management Cost Summary

<u>DRP (Sweetwater)</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	CARL
Salary	\$83,306	\$72,319
OPS	\$24,960	\$44,720
Expense	\$16,800	\$49,730
OCO	\$101,252	\$1,000
TOTAL	\$226,318	\$167,769

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted

Management Cost Summary

<u>DRP (North)</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	CARL
Salary	\$72,319	\$72,319
OPS	\$44,720	\$44,720
Expense	\$49,730	\$49,730
OCO	\$81,527	\$1,000
TOTAL	\$248,296	\$167,769

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted

Management Cost Summary

<u>DRP (Teal Timber North Tract)</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	Florida Forever, legislative appropriation, etc.	""
Salary (# FTE)	2 FTE; \$150,000	6 FTE; \$430,000
OPS (# OPS)	2 OPS; \$110,000	4 OPS; \$220,000
Resource Management	\$1,500,000	\$50,000
Capital Improvements	\$11,000,000	\$35,000
Visitor Services/Recreation	\$200,000	\$75,000
Support	\$550,000	\$50,000
Administration	\$45,000	\$5,000
TOTAL	\$13,555,000	\$865,000

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted



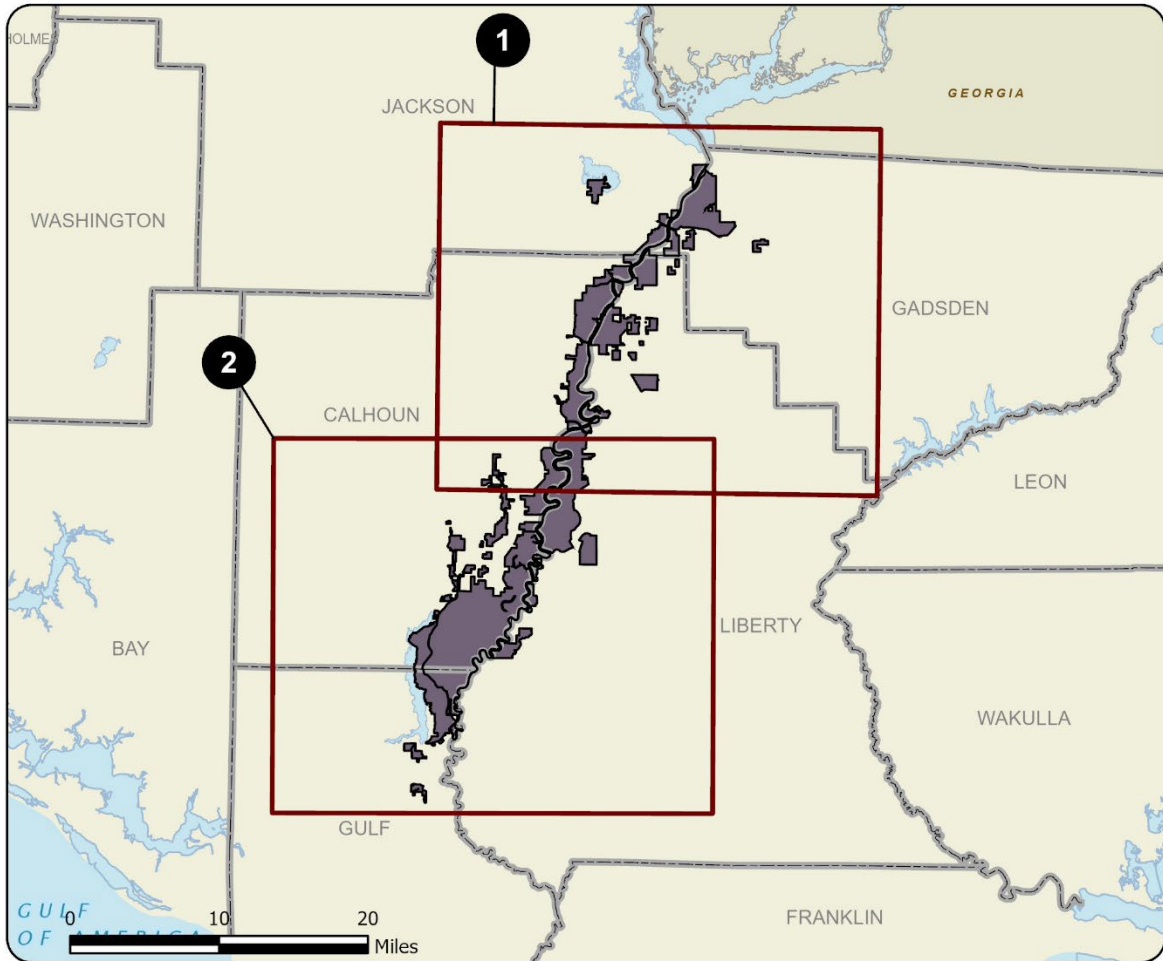


Management Cost Summary

<u>FWC (Teal Timber South Tract)</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	Florida Forever, legislative appropriation, etc.	""
Salary (# FTE)	not provided	not provided
OPS (#OPS)	not provided	not provided
Resource Management	\$990,000	\$650,000
Capital Improvements	\$437,000	\$97,000
Visitor Services/Recreation	\$401,000	\$61,000
Support	\$518,000	\$178,000
Administration	\$354,000	\$14,000
TOTAL	\$2,700,000	\$1,000,000

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted

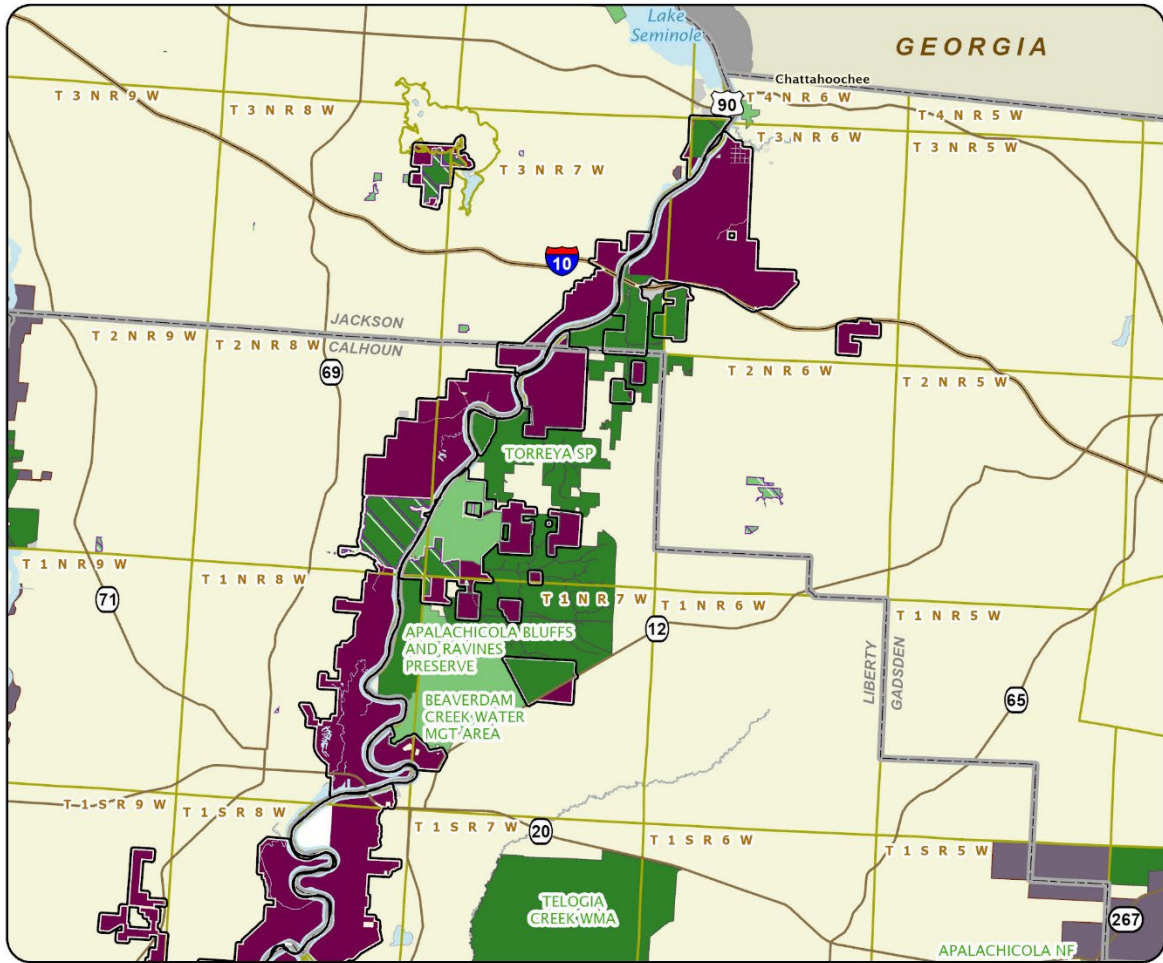




### APALACHICOLA RIVER: OVERVIEW

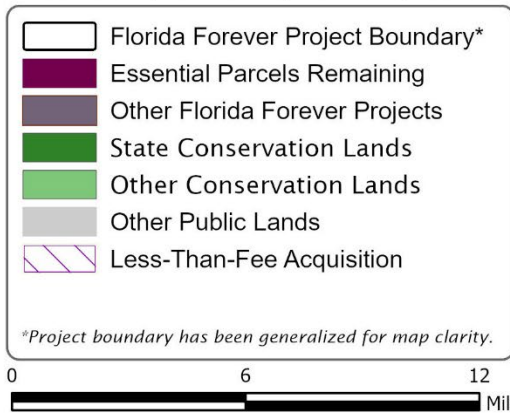
CALHOUN, GADSDEN, GULF, JACKSON, AND LIBERTY COUNTIES

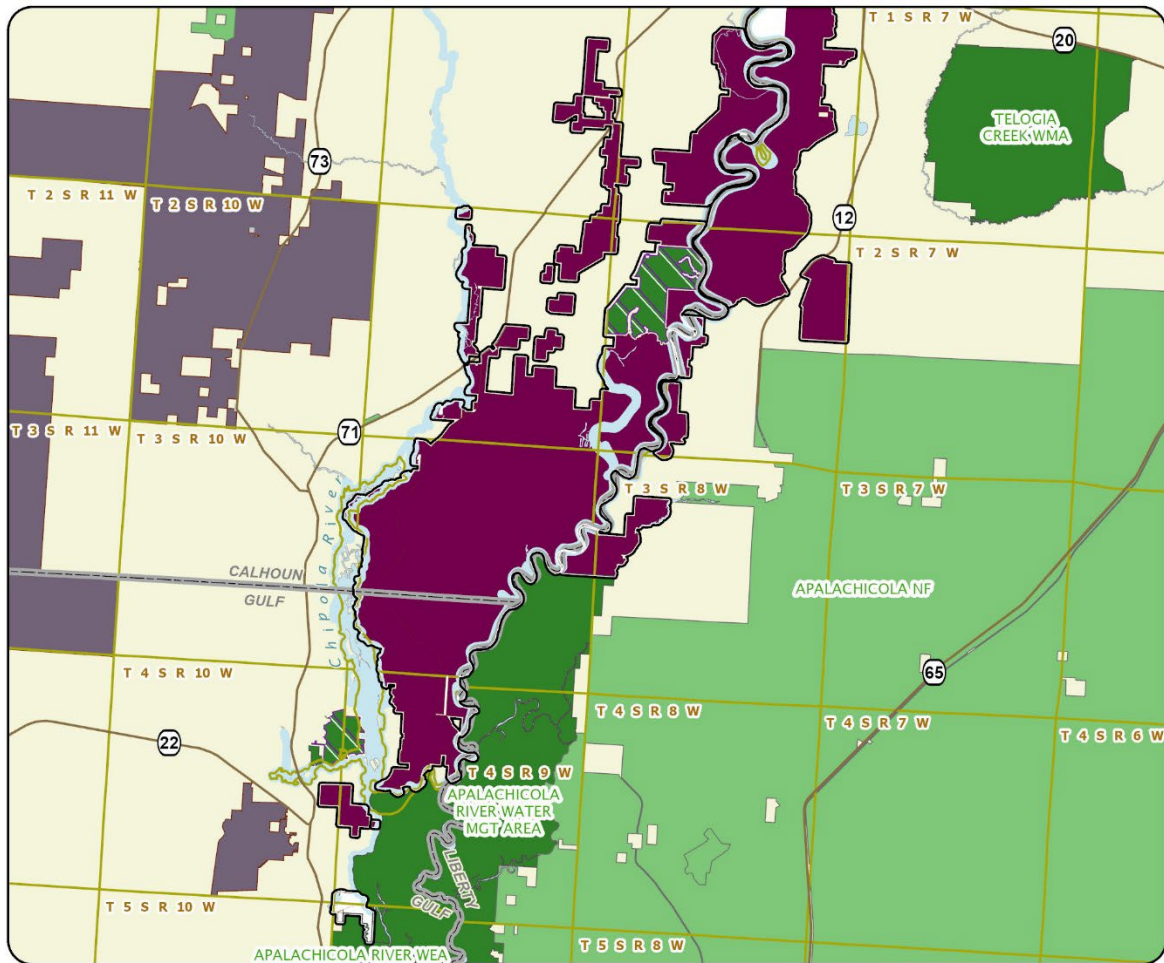




APALACHICOLA RIVER: MAP 1

CALHOUN, GADSDEN, JACKSON, AND LIBERTY COUNTIES





APALACHICOLA RIVER: MAP 2

CALHOUN, GULF, AND LIBERTY COUNTIES

- Florida Forever Project Boundary\*
  - Essential Parcels Remaining
  - Other Florida Forever Projects
  - State Conservation Lands
  - Other Conservation Lands
  - Other Public Lands
  - Less-Than-Fee Acquisition
- \*Project boundary has been generalized for map clarity.

