

Bear Creek Forest

Critical Natural Lands

Bay, Calhoun and Gulf Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	<i>2004</i>
<i>Project Acres</i>	<i>101,659</i>
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	<i>15,268</i>
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	<i>86,391</i>
<i>2025 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	<i>\$89,523,083</i>

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Bear Creek Forest project will help to establish the Northwest Florida Ecological Greenway, a proposed system of natural areas forming a significant corridor connection between conservation lands in the central Florida Panhandle. The project will increase the protection of Florida's biodiversity through the protection, restoration and maintenance of the quality and function of the state's diverse ecosystems. The project will help to ensure that enough quantities of water are available to meet the current and future needs of natural ecosystems and the public.

General Description

The Bear Creek Forest project is in Bay, Calhoun and Gulf counties. This landscape consists of pine plantations interspersed with wet prairies and forested wetlands including baygalls, dome swamps, basin swamps and floodplain swamps. The site also contains upland forests, including sandhill, scrubby and mesic flatwoods. The Bear Creek Forest project is located 6 miles southeast of the Econfina Creek Water Management Area, 6 miles north of Tyndall Air Force Base and 2 miles southwest of the Middle Chipola River Florida Forever project. The Chipola Experimental Forest, managed by the U.S. Forest Service, is adjacent to the project on its northwest side near State Road 20.





Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Reticulated flatwoods salamander	G1/S1
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>Dark-headed hatpins*</i>	G1/S1
<i>Pinewoods aster*</i>	G1?/S1?
<i>Godfrey's butterwort*</i>	G2/S2
Yellow-sided clubtail	G2/S2
<i>Giant water cowbane*</i>	G5T2/S2
<i>Mock pennyroyal*</i>	G2G3/S2S3
<i>Narrow-leaved phoebanthus*</i>	G3/S3
<i>Fever tree*</i>	G4/S2
Alligator snapping turtle	G3/S3
<i>*Plant species are in italics</i>	

Public Use

Public use will include resource-based recreation and educational opportunities. The Florida Forest Service (FFS) anticipates that interpretive and user services recreation facilities will be developed and the use of low impact, rustic facilities will be stressed. The project is accessible from public roadways and near the major urban area of Panama City.

Acquisition Planning

2004

On June 4, 2004, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) added the Bear Creek Forest project to Group B of the Florida Forever 2004 Interim Priority List. This fee simple project, sponsored by FFS and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), consisted of approximately 104,461 acres owned by the Great Western Timber Company. In 2004, the project had an estimated tax-assessed value of \$15,041,536.

2005

On January 27, 2005, ARC moved the project to Group A of the 2005 Florida Forever Priority List.

On June 3, 2005, ARC moved the project to Group B of the 2005 Florida Forever Interim Priority List.

2011

On December 9, 2011, ARC placed this project in the Florida Forever category of Critical Natural Lands projects.





2024

In December 2024, ARC approved the addition of one parcel totaling approximately 1,211.47 acres in Bay County to the project boundary.

2025

On June 10, 2025, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection acquired, in fee, 12,262.2 acres in Bay County from Bear Creek Timber, LLC. This acquisition created the Sandy Creek State Forest.

Coordination

FFS and TNC are acquisition partners.

Management Policy Statement

The principal purposes of the project include the protection of biodiversity and the provision of resource-based public recreation and educational opportunities; and management would be oriented to conserving and protecting wildlife species, and careful control of public uses.

Manager

FFS will manage the proposed project.

Management Prospectus

Qualifications for State Designation

Most of the acreage of this project consists of slash and loblolly pine plantations. Some of the pine plantations have been bedded, but several areas still have native groundcover and understory species. With thinning, the introduction of prescribed fire and sustainable forestry management practices, the project could be quickly transformed from silviculture to an area managed for ecological and recreational benefits. The project's size and diversity make it desirable for use and management as a state forest.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

Much of the project's flatwoods, hardwood forest and sandhill areas have been disturbed by silviculture operations and will require restoration efforts. Areas where timber species are off-site may require thinning or removing trees to help regenerate native ground covers and canopy.

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

Public access will be immediately provided for low-intensity outdoor recreation activities such as hunting and fishing. FFS proposes to manage the site as a state forest and will carry out





management activities and coordinate public access and use. FFS will cooperate with other state agencies, local government entities and interested parties as appropriate. Expenditures are going to be needed on this parcel for prescribed fire, vegetative and hydrologic restoration, improved public access/use, and facilities both public and administrative. It is anticipated that some of the existing roads and trails may be used as multi-use trails for hiking, horseback riding and biking.

Revenue-generating Potential

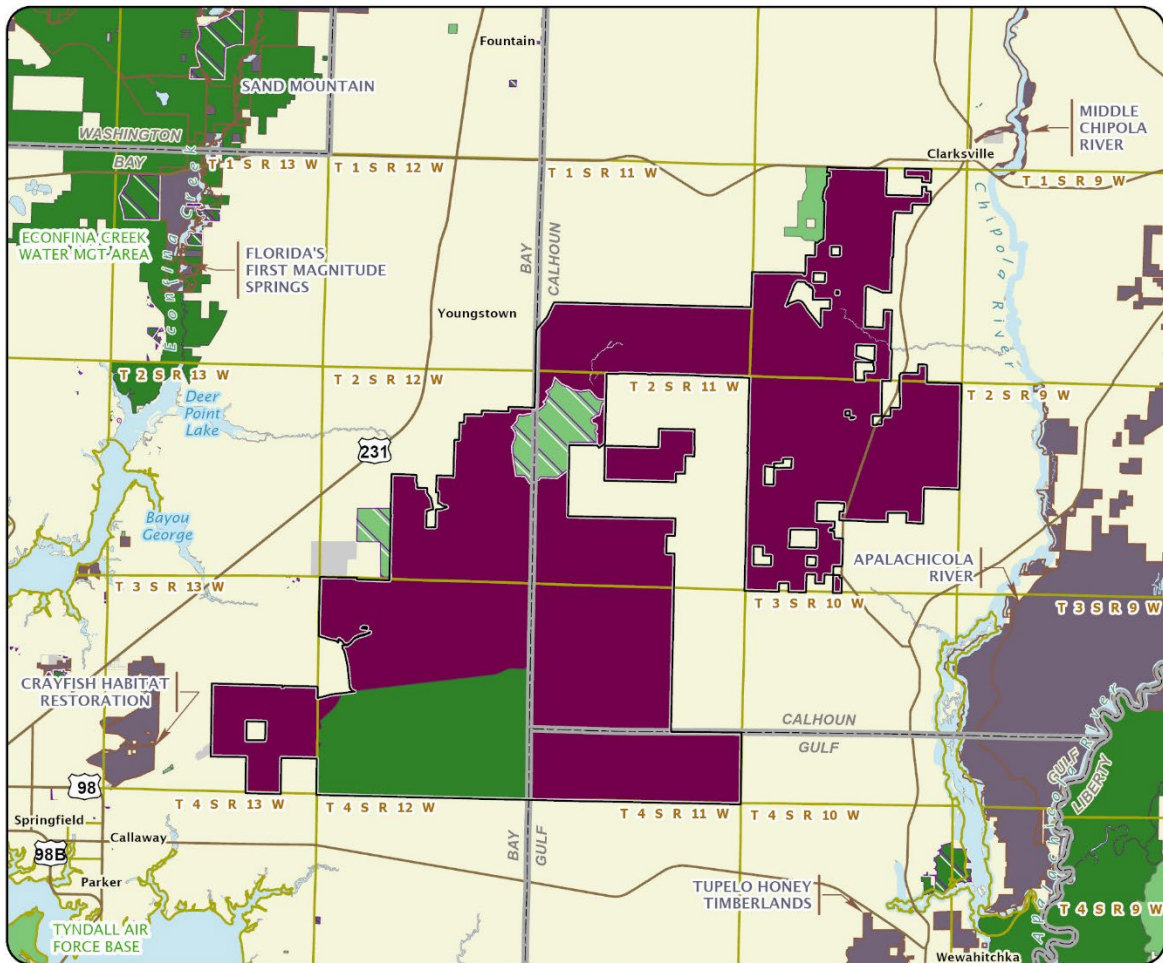
Timber sales will be conducted as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions. These sales will primarily take place in planted pine stands and will provide a variable source of revenue dependent upon a variety of factors. Due to the existing condition and volume of the timber resources on the property, revenue generating potential of this property is expected to be moderate. Some revenues might be realized in the future from recreational user fees and ecotourism activities if such projects could be economically developed.

Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	Land Acquisition Trust Fund	not provided
Salary (9 FTE)	\$293,345	not provided
OPS	\$0	not provided
Expense	\$797,000	not provided
OCO	\$852,260	not provided
TOTAL	\$1,942,605	not provided

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





BEAR CREEK FOREST

BAY, CALHOUN, AND GULF 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

