

# Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed

Partnerships and Regional Incentives

Collier and Lee Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	<i>1991</i>
<i>Project Acres</i>	<i>69,703</i>
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	<i>40,218</i>
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	<i>29,485</i>
<i>2025 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	<i>\$180,529,200</i>

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed project will create conservation connections between the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and the National Audubon Society's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. The project will provide critical habitat protection for rare and imperiled wildlife such as the Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*). The project will also protect the flow of water feeding the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, Fakahatchee Strand and other hydrologically connected systems.

## General Description

The Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed project, located in Collier and Lee counties, consists of quality cypress swamps and marshes along with some upland areas that are vulnerable to agricultural and residential development. The project will connect the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and the National Audubon Society's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary together to secure important habitat for the Florida panther and Florida black bear. The large expanses of wetlands within the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed are believed to be important to the survival of many rare and critically imperiled species, including at least two species of rare and endangered orchids and an unusual stand of dwarf bald cypress.





Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) Element Occurrence Summary

<b><u>FNAI Elements</u></b>	<b><u>Score</u></b>
Florida panther	G5T1/S1
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Swallow-tailed kite	G5/S2
<i>Fakahatchee ladies'-tresses*</i>	G4T1/S1S2
Rafinesque's big-eared bat	G3/S1
<i>Clamshell orchid*</i>	G4G5T2/S2
<i>Narrow-leaved Carolina scalystem*</i>	G4T2/S2
Wood stork	G4/S2
Eastern diamondback rattlesnake	G3/S3
Bald eagle	G5/S3
Snowy egret	G5/S3
Yellow-crowned night heron	G5/S3
<i>*Plant species are in italics</i>	

**Public Use**

This project is designated as a wildlife and environmental area with such uses as hiking, camping and environmental education.

**Acquisition Planning**

**1990**

On December 7, 1990, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council added the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed project to the Conservation and Recreational Lands Priority List. This project, sponsored by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), consists of 18,205 acres, 73 landowners and a taxable value of \$23,704,330. The entire project is in both Lee and Collier counties and contains approximately 49,810 acres. However, the initial focus of land acquisition is on the Camp Keis Strand Corridor (18,205 acres).

The Collier family is the largest landowner in the Camp Keis Strand Corridor. If fee simple acquisition is not negotiable, then conservation easements or other less-than-fee acquisition techniques will be pursued.

**1992**

On November 20, 1992, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council amended the project design to allow matching funds anywhere within the project for “new” acquisitions (acquired after November 20, 1992) by its partners, Lee County and SFWMD.





### **1993**

On September 20, 1993, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved a 3,182-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by SFWMD, consisted of four tracts and multiple landowners, and a taxable value of \$8,636,331. The original amendment was for 4,022 acres; however, 840 acres of one tract was already in the current boundary.

### **1995**

On October 30, 1995, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved a 612-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by SFWMD and had a taxable value of \$891,403. The original amendment was for 1,132 acres; however, 520 acres were already in the current boundary.

### **1996**

On December 5, 1996, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council approved a 3,040-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by SFWMD, consisted of two sites and had a taxable value of \$9,029,712. The original amendment was for four sites and 4,040 acres; however, only sites three (excluding the south half of section 35) and four were approved.

### **1999**

On December 9, 1999, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council approved a 2,560-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by SFWMD and the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed Trust, consisting of 353 parcels, 260 landowners and had a taxable value of \$10,500,000. The parcels were designated as essential.

### **2002**

On June 6, 2002, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) approved a 424-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by SFWMD, consisting of 147 parcels and multiple landowners, and had a taxable value of \$2,570,240.

### **2007**

On December 17, 2007, Collier County acquired the 367.7-acre Caracara Prairie Preserve, of which approximately 40 acres are in the project boundary.

### **2009**

On February 6, 2009, Collier County acquired 2,499 acres, known as Pepper Ranch, for \$32,525,080 via the Conservation Collier Program.





In October 2009, Lee County acquired approximately 15 acres for \$136,500 for their 20/20 program. SFWMD donated 10 acres to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) in the same month. The following lands were bought by SFWMD: June 2009 and November 2009 (58 GIS acres/\$661,250); three easement tracts (15) were donated by Bonita Springs Utility Company; November 2010 (191 acres/\$3,828,890); and December 2010 (5 acres/\$75,000).

## **2011**

On December 9, 2011, ARC added this project to the Partnerships and Regional Incentives category.

## **2012**

On August 17, 2012, ARC approved the removal of 468 developed or non-contiguous parcels totaling 1,541.2 acres.

## **2013**

On February 15, 2013, ARC removed 77 acres from the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed in Lee and Collier counties because development has already disturbed the property.

## **2015**

In 2015, township-range-sections 47S27E6 (632.96 acres) and 47S27E7 (627.75 acres) were added to Corkscrew Sanctuary. Approximately 478 acres of section six and all of section seven are in the project boundary.

## **2016**

On October 21, 2016, ARC voted to add the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed Headwaters proposal to the existing Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed project as an amendment. This adds 2,841 acres to the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed in the southeastern corner of Lee County in a plan to use willing sellers of groves to make hydrologic fixes to drainage areas that affected downstream areas. The goals for the addition include conserving fresh water that has run off into other areas, restoring water levels of the Corkscrew Swamp, improving habitat for such species as the Florida panther and the wood stork and creating public recreation opportunities. The Florida Department of Transportation is coordinating with SFWMD staff to possibly use this area as mitigation for the widening of State Road 82.





## **2017**

On December 4, 2017, Lee County acquired Larry Kiker Preserve (4,000 acres) via the Lee County Conservation 20/20 program, of which 2,690 acres are within the project boundary.

## **2025**

In August 2025, ARC removed approximately 602 acres from the project boundary that were deemed unsuitable for state acquisition.

### Coordination

Acquisition partners are SFWMD and Lee and Collier counties. Both The Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land have been intermediaries in the acquisition of some tracts. Resolutions in support of this project include a pledge from Lee County for \$1.5 million.

### Management Policy Statement

The primary management goals of the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed are to conserve and protect significant habitat for native and imperiled species; and conserve, protect, manage or restore important ecosystems to enhance or protect significant natural resources which local or state regulatory programs cannot adequately protect.

### Manager(s)

SFWMD is the recommended manager.

### Management Prospectus

#### **Qualifications for State Designation**

The project's size, natural communities and extremely sensitive wildlife resources qualify it as a wildlife management area.

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

There are various intensities of management required for lands in the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed. There are low-need parcels such as virgin stands of cypress that require little or no management. There are also moderate-need tracts that need basic resource management such as prescribed burning, and high-need tracts that have been completely altered. Severely altered tracts, such as agricultural fields, must be ecologically restored.

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

The initial land management plan was implemented in February 1991. Planning and operational activities are ongoing. Public use guidelines, including public access, have been established and are constantly being revised.





### Revenue-generating Potential

FWC may lead to activities (such as hunting) that will generate revenue through permit and license fees. No other revenue-producing practices are envisioned at this stage of the management program.

### Cooperators in Management Activities

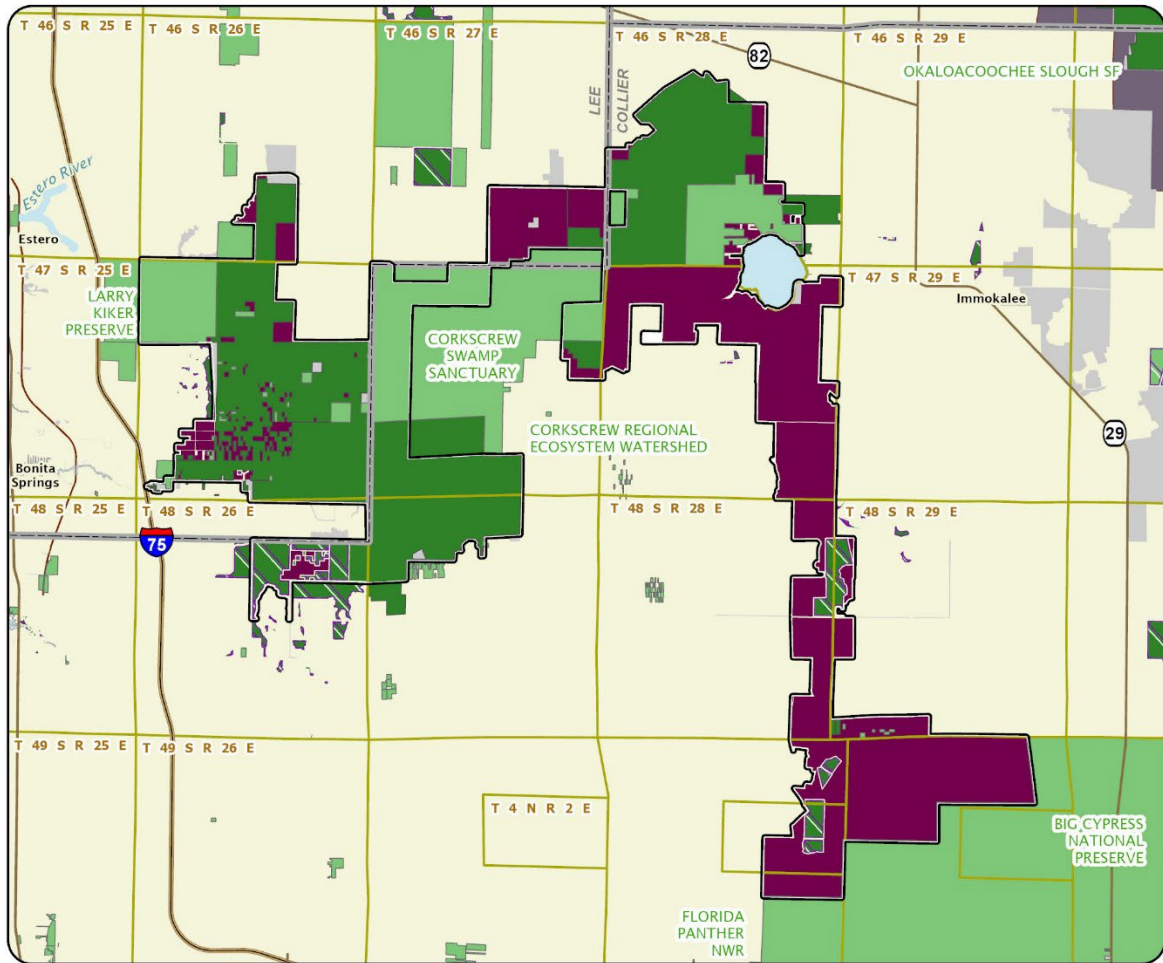
A cooperative management agreement with FWC was executed on September 6, 1994. The project now receives regular inspections by SFWMD staff and law enforcement patrol by FWC Reserve program. Under the agreement, FWC will enforce all laws, rules and regulations applicable to the management of the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed. Additional land acquired will be given the same protection.

#### Management Cost Summary

<u>SFWMD</u>	<u>1996/97</u>	<u>1997/98</u>
Source of Funds	Water Management Lands Trust Fund	
Salary	\$107,238	\$117,961
OPS	\$35,000	\$38,500
Expense	\$197,250	\$216,915
OCO	\$0	\$28,000
FCO	\$0	Not Provided
TOTAL	\$339,488	\$401,376








Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





### CORKSCREW REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM WATERSHED

#### COLLIER AND LEE 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.

