

# Coupon Bight/Key Deer

Climate Change Lands

Monroe County

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| <i>Year Added to Priority List</i>            | 1985          |
| <i>Project Acres</i>                          | 2,871         |
| <i>Acquired Acres</i>                         | 2,242         |
| <i>Remaining Project Acres</i>                | 629           |
| <i>2025 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i> | \$107,790,250 |

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Coupon Bight/Key Deer project will protect the subtropical pine forests of rapidly developing Big Pine Key and surrounding islands that provide habitat for the federally endangered Key deer (*Odocoileus virginianus clavium*) and many Caribbean plants found nowhere else in the country. The project will protect the remaining undeveloped land on Big Pine Key and No Name Key; critical for the survival of the Key deer and to provide a buffer for the National Key Deer Refuge (NKDR). Rich coral reefs and other hardbottom communities flourish in shallow water around the islands. The project will protect the water quality of the Coupon Bight Aquatic Preserve and provide the public with an opportunity to appreciate the unique natural world in this part of Florida.

## General Description

The project is within the Florida Keys Area of Critical State Concern and encompasses virtually all the undeveloped land between the Coupon Bight Aquatic Preserve and the NKDR on Big Pine Key and No Name Key. It includes the only significant sources of fresh water in the lower keys, which are critical to the survival of the Key deer. The pine rocklands and associated communities in this project area are the largest and most well-preserved left in the world. At least 36 rare plant species, of which 28 are state-listed as endangered or threatened, are known to occur within the project. Several of these species will most likely go extinct if this area is developed for residential use. At least 17 rare animal species, of which four are state-listed as endangered or threatened, are known to occur within the project.





Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) Element Occurrence Summary

| <b><u>FNAI Elements</u></b>          | <b><u>Score</u></b> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Semaphore pricklypear</i>         | G1/S1               |
| Key deer                             | G5T1/S1             |
| Loggerhead sea turtle                | G2G4/S3             |
| <i>Cape Sable thoroughwort</i>       | G1/S1               |
| <i>Sand flax</i>                     | G1/S1               |
| <i>Tree cactus</i>                   | G1/S1               |
| <i>Garber's spurge</i>               | G1/S1               |
| Key silverside                       | G1Q/S1              |
| <i>Few-flowered fingergrass</i>      | G1/S1               |
| <i>Broom Sandmat</i>                 | G1/S1               |
| <i>Three-spined pricklypear</i>      | G1/S1               |
| Lower Keys marsh rabbit              | G5T1/S1             |
| <i>*Plant species are in italics</i> |                     |

Public Use

This project is designated as a buffer preserve and a wildlife and environmental area to the NKDR. It will allow such uses as photography, nature appreciation and hiking.

Acquisition Planning

**Phases**

Coupon Bight Phase I: The Strachley Tract [acquired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) through The Trust for Public Land] and the Brothers tract.

Phase II: Developable uplands (a few larger acreage tracts have been acquired by the state — the Pepper and Papps tracts and some subdivision lots in Piney Point, Tropical Park and Kinercha north of the bight).

Phase III: Jurisdictional wetlands. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s (DEP) Division of State Lands further refined the priority acquisitions to large acreage tracts.

**1994**

On November 18, 1994, the Land Acquisition Advisory Council added 258 acres to the project.

**1995**

On October 30, 1995, the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council added 11.38 acres to the project boundary.





## **2004**

In January 2004, DEP transferred Coupon Bight State Buffer Preserve to USFWS for management as part of the NKDR, at least some of which is within the project boundary.

On January 22, 2004, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) removed the Rothdeutsch property (0.33 acres) from the project at the request of the owner.

## **2005**

On February 11, 2005, ARC approved a 376-acre fee-simple addition to the project boundary, with a 2004 total assessed value of \$3,240,815.

## **2011**

On December 9, 2011, ARC placed this project in the Climate Change Lands category.

Acquisition activity is focusing on tracts providing a viable corridor between the Coupon Bight and Key Deer portions of the project. All the owners have received an offer.

## **2012**

On April 20, 2012, ARC removed 271 acres (810 parcels) from the project that a staff review found were disturbed by development.

On October 29, 2012, the Terrestris Preserve (22.56 acres) was donated by the Monroe County Land Authority (MCLA) to USFWS, some of which is in the project boundary.

## **2020**

In 2020, six parcels were acquired containing 0.93 acres at a cost of \$242,850: Dmoch (one parcel); Gouldy (one parcel); George (one parcel); and Hart (three parcels). They will be managed by Monroe County.

## **2021**

In 2021, DEP acquired 0.15 acres fee simple from the Estate of Sarah Gahm to be managed for conservation purposes by MCLA.

## **2022**

DEP acquired, in fee, parcels from four individual owners totaling 7.56 acres.

## **2023**

In October 2023, ARC voted to remove approximately 231 acres from the project that were deemed unsuitable for State acquisition.





In 2023, DEP acquired, in fee, parcels from Monroe County totaling 3.99 acres.

## **2024**

On January 16, 2024, DEP acquired, in fee, 0.14 acres in Monroe County from MCLA.

On February 8, 2024, DEP acquired, in fee, 0.11 acres in Monroe County from MCLA.

On June 26, 2024, DEP acquired, in fee, 0.12 acres in Monroe County from MCLA.

In July 2024, DEP acquired, in fee, 2.05 acres in Monroe County from MCLA.

In October 2024, DEP acquired, in fee, 0.21 acres in Monroe County from MCLA.

On December 9, 2024, DEP acquired, in fee, 0.99 acres in Monroe County from Michael R. and Rose Elizabeth Hussey.

## **2025**

On February 20, 2025, DEP acquired, in fee, 0.25 acres in Monroe County from MCLA.

On May 23, 2025, DEP acquired, in fee, 7.1 acres in Monroe County from Tropical Isles, Inc.

On September 11, 2025, DEP acquired, in fee, 0.11 acres in Monroe County from MCLA.

On October 21, 2025, DEP acquired, in fee, 0.58 acres in Monroe County from MCLA.

## Coordination

The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and USFWS are acquisition partners for this site. The Nature Conservancy acted as an intermediary in the negotiation of 520 acres, expending approximately \$5,124,000 on behalf of SFWMD and USFWS. USFWS included this project as an addition to the NKDR.

The MCLA is an acquisition partner on this project and has acquired almost 188 acres from January 1, 2005, through December 31, 2024.

## Management Policy Statement

The primary goals of management of the Coupon Bight/Key Deer project are to conserve and protect environmentally unique and irreplaceable lands that contain native, relatively unaltered flora and fauna representing a natural area unique to, or scarce within, a region of this state or a larger geographic area; to conserve and protect lands within areas of critical state concern; to conserve and protect significant habitat for native species or endangered and threatened species; and to conserve, protect, manage or restore important ecosystems, landscapes and forests, in order to enhance or protect significant surface water, coastal, recreational, timber, fish or wildlife resources which local or state regulatory programs cannot adequately protect.





### Manager(s)

USFWS will manage most of this project; however, MCLA will be a cooperating manager for a small portion of the project.

### Management Prospectus

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

The property will function as a buffer preserve to Coupon Bight Aquatic Preserve, NKDR and sovereign submerged lands.

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

Impediments to management are illegal dumping, vehicular trespass and poaching. Regular patrols, cleanup efforts, posting of the property and management presence would curtail these problems. USFWS land is open to the public but because of limited facilities, minimal resource management and protection would be needed.

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

Within the first year after acquisition, the area north of U.S. Highway 1 would be posted in the same manner as existing NKDR lands and provided protection under Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations. USFWS law enforcement officers would routinely patrol the area. Permitted activities would be limited to uses such as hiking, bird watching and photography. There would be no nighttime use, pets, camping, use of motorized vehicles or collection of plants and animals. Regular patrols by preserve staff will assist in the detection of potential encroachments and/or violations.

Long-range goals would include the development of a detailed management plan for the perpetuation and maintenance of natural communities. A prescribed burning plan would be formulated in pine rockland habitat; long-term monitoring and an active research program would be part of this program. An in-depth resource inventory would be carried out to identify and map sensitive areas that warrant special consideration and management. There will be no infrastructure development in natural areas; unnecessary roads will be abandoned or removed. Long-term management needs include exotic plant control and wetlands restoration. Public access will be allowed on a limited basis. Acquisition has been primarily directed at unimproved properties. If the preserve acquires improved property, efforts would be made to use it for offices, education facilities and/or workshop and storage space.





### Revenue-generating Potential

Given the sensitivity of the natural resources of the preserve, large-scale use by the public is not recommended. Low-impact recreational and/or private commercial activities, such as canoe/kayak concessions and wildlife photography/filming may potentially generate some revenue.

### Cooperators in Management Activities

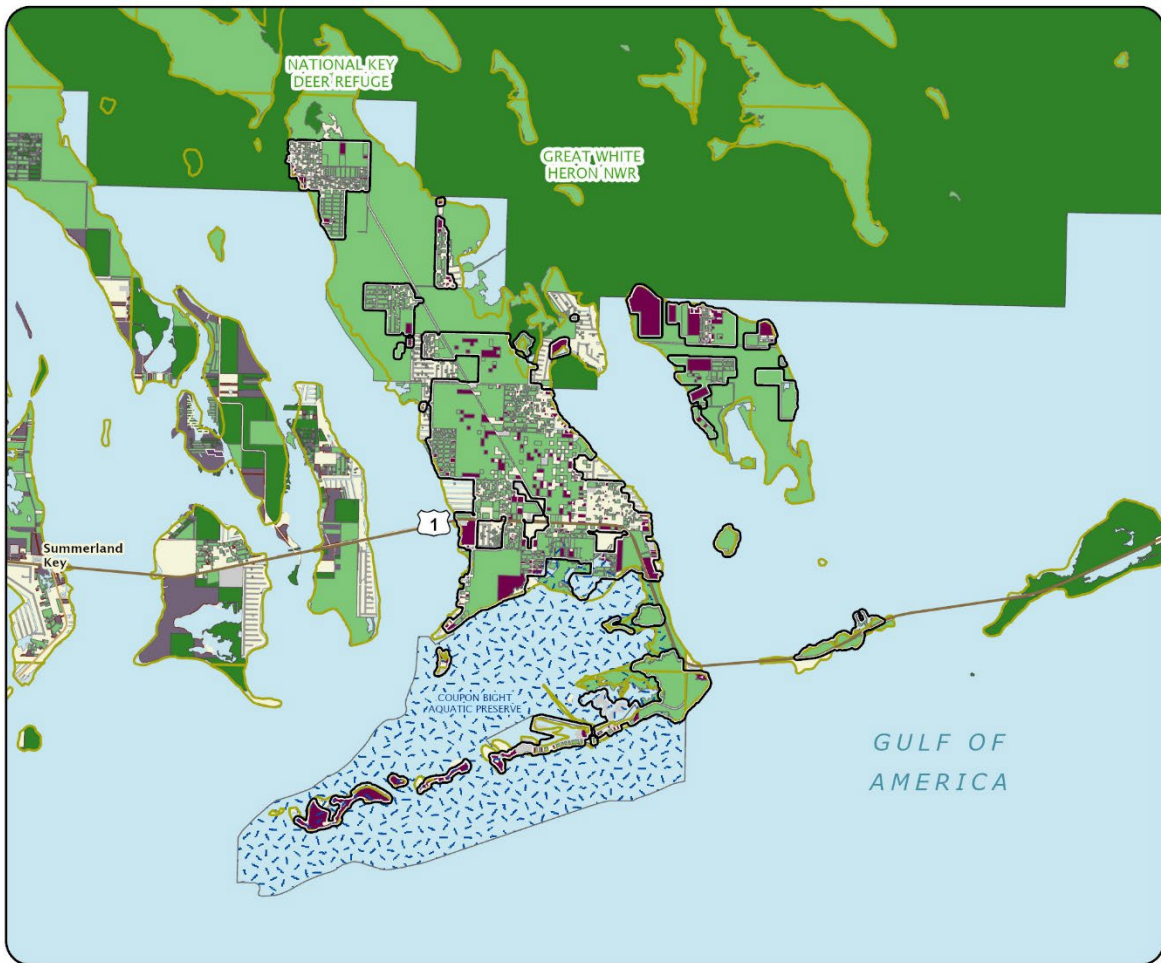
Security of the project area will depend upon the assistance and cooperation of state and local law enforcement.

#### Management Cost Summary

| <u>USFWS, NKDR and MCLA</u> | <u>2000/2001</u> | <u>2001/2002</u> |
|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Salary                      | not provided     | not provided     |
| OPS                         | not provided     | not provided     |
| Expense                     | \$12,048         | \$21,000         |
| OCO                         | not provided     | not provided     |
| Other – Special Category    | \$1,445          | not provided     |
| TOTAL                       | \$13,493         | \$21,000         |

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





### COUPON BIGHT/KEY DEER

#### MONROE COUNTY

