

Creeks to Choctawhatchee River

Partnerships and Regional Incentives

Walton County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2025
<i>Project Acres</i>	2,231
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	2,231
<i>2025 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$6,157,231

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Creeks to Choctawhatchee River project would contribute to the surface water protection of the creeks and tributaries that drain into the Choctawhatchee River, an Outstanding Florida Waterway. The project would also increase the amount of forestland available for the sustainable management of natural resources. In addition, the project would protect functional wetlands and groundwater recharge areas critical to the military readiness of Eglin Air Force Base and the ecologically diverse landscape that overlaps its mission footprint.

General Description

The Creeks to Choctawhatchee River project contains three tracts situated about 2.5 miles away from each other. The project is not adjacent to any existing conservation lands but is west of a conservation corridor along the Choctawhatchee River and north of a swath of conservation lands connecting Eglin Air Force Base to the river. The nearest managed area is Ponce de Leon Springs State Park, approximately 1 mile east. The property has been used for silviculture and recreation since the 1970s. As such, 73 percent of the upland was converted to pine plantation. Improvements include a single-family home and barn located together on one parcel. A utility corridor traverses the northern two tracts.

Bottomland forest is the most common natural community on the property, located along small, meandering creek drainages. Upland hardwood forest, located at the upper reaches of creek drainages, feature a very diverse tree canopy. Native groundcover species were observed on an approximately 4-acre area of remnant sandhill in the footprint of the utility corridor. These habitats are highly important for a diverse array of rare plants and animals, including *Matalea*, Florida mountain-mint (*Pycnanthemum floridanum*), gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*)



and Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*). Invasive species, including Japanese climbing fern (*Lygodium japonicum*), Chinese tallow (*Triadica sebifera*) and cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*), were observed at the time of the site visit.

Several creeks can be found on the property including Oak Grove Branch, which feeds into Sandy Creek; White Creek, Crooked Creek and Peavy Creek, which feed into Bruce Creek; and an unnamed tributary of Mill Creek. All these creeks eventually drain into the Choctawhatchee River, an Outstanding Florida Water. Additionally, the Creeks to Choctawhatchee River project overlaps with the Northwest Florida Water Management District’s Choctawhatchee River and Bay Surface Water Improvement and Management Plan designed to protect the state’s priority surface waterbodies.

Almost the entirety of the project (96 percent) is located within Priority 2 of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network. The project also lies within the Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape; a regional partnership planning boundary focused on limiting threats to military installations across the panhandle.

Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>Florida mountain-mint*</i>	G3/S3
<i>*Plant species are in italics</i>	

Public Use

If acquired, the Creeks to Choctawhatchee River project will be managed by the Florida Forest Service (FFS) as a part of Pine Log State Forest.

Acquisition Planning

2025

On October 10, 2025, the Acquisition and Restoration Council voted to add the Creeks to Choctawhatchee River project to the 2026 Florida Forever Priority List.

Coordination

The Trust for Public Land proposed this project.





Management Policy Statement

The purpose of acquiring this tract is to conserve forestland in Florida. State acquisition of the natural resources would provide essential water quality protection along the Choctawhatchee River, a state-designated Outstanding Florida Water.

Manager(s)

FFS is the identified manager for the Creeks to Choctawhatchee River project.

Management Prospectus

Qualifications for State Designation

FFS' mission is to "...manage the forest resources through a stewardship ethic to assure they are available for future generations." By acquiring more forestland that is suitable to provide forest resources for future generations, state acquisition of the subject property does align with FFS' management mission. The property is suitable for multiple-use management activities including silviculture, the use of Best Management Practices which will benefit the Choctawhatchee River water quality, public access and recreation, and restoration. Benefits the public would gain through the addition of this tract to Pine Log State Forest include increased acreage for recreational opportunities such as hiking, hunting, kayaking/canoeing, horseback riding, photography and Operation Outdoor Freedom events. Additionally, the management of timber on the tract would provide an economic return on the state forest and support the local timber industry.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

The planted pine stands have been rotationally cut and reforested for more than 40 years. The most recent cut was approximately 120 acres in fall 2024 and has not yet been replanted. Approximately 1,000 acres were cut in 2018 and have been reforested. Prescribed fire should be applied following the first thinning and during the dormant season to promote habitat diversity, increase wildlife browsing, promote plant diversity and help mitigate wildfire.

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

Management strategies will center on the multiple-use concept, as defined in sections 589.04(3) and 253.034(2)(a), Florida Statutes. Implementation of this concept will utilize and conserve state forest resources in a harmonious and coordinated combination that will best serve the people of the State of Florida, and that is consistent with the purpose for which the forest was acquired. Multiple-use management for the tract will be accomplished with the following strategies:





- Practice sustainable forest management for the efficient generation of revenue and in support of state forest management objectives.
- Provide for resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities for multiple interests.
- Restore and manage healthy forests and native ecosystems ensuring the long-term viability of populations and species listed as endangered, threatened or rare, and other components of biological diversity including game and nongame wildlife and plants.
- Protect known archaeological, historical, cultural and paleontological resources.
- Restore, maintain and protect hydrological functions related to water resources and the health of associated wetland and aquatic communities.

Additionally, short-term management goals may be established regarding site security measures, public access, timber inventory and stand information. The establishment of long-term goals may include consideration of additional positions, infrastructure and equipment funding.

FFS uses a multiple-use management concept when managing state lands. On-site acreage suitable for timber management may also be used for public recreational activities, historical preservation and potential interpretation and habitat diversity. Various management activities such as prescribed fire allow multiple uses, like recreation and habitat management, to coexist on a healthy and balanced landscape.

Public recreation opportunities on this tract will be evaluated and may include horseback riding and passive resource-based activities such as hiking, wildlife viewing, nature study, paddling and primitive camping. Public hunting and Operation Outdoor Freedom event opportunities will be evaluated in cooperation with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Research projects or other opportunities for scientific study for the purpose of obtaining information which expands the knowledge of and assists in restoration and management of this ecosystem may be appropriate once evaluated.

Timber resources will be managed to promote forest health. Timber sales on a rotational basis will provide a source of ongoing revenue, while improving forest health by eradicating diseased and weakened trees, reducing competition for light and providing wildlife with various diverse areas suitable for nesting and foraging. Timber management including prescribed fire provides invasive treatment and nutrient replenishment for ecosystem health.





Revenue-generating Potential

The potential to generate revenue from the tract is high. User fees, silviculture and miscellaneous forest products may be considered for revenue-generating potential. Staff may evaluate other potential revenue-generating opportunities, as appropriate.

Cooperators in Management Activities

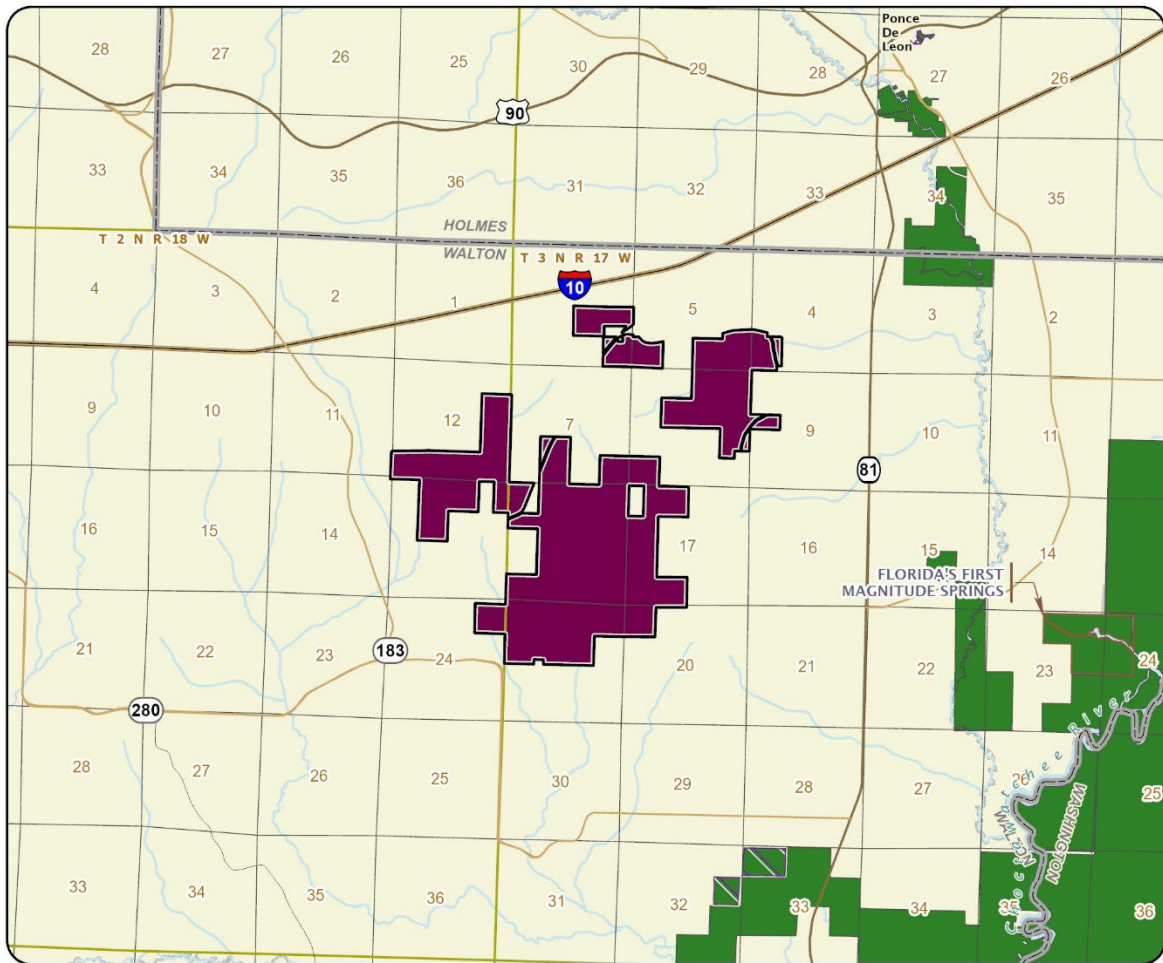
It is anticipated that management funding will come from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF), or other funding opportunities as appropriate. Estimated budget needs for interim management are as follows:

Management Cost Summary

FFS	Startup	Recurring
Source	LATF	LATF
Salary (2 FTE)	\$205,000	\$205,000
OPS (2 OPS)	\$75,000	\$75,000
Resource Management	\$10,000	\$15,000
Capital Improvements	\$15,000	\$10,000
Visitor Services/ Recreation	\$2,000	\$5,000
Support	\$50,000	\$10,000
Administration	\$5,000	\$2,500
TOTAL	\$362,000	\$322,500

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted.





CREEKS TO CHOCTAWHATCHEE RIVER

WALTON COUNTY

-  Florida Forever Project Boundary
-  Essential Parcels Remaining
-  Other Florida Forever Projects
-  State Conservation Lands
-  Other Public Lands
-  Less-Than-Fee Acquisition

