

Gardner Marsh

Critical Natural Lands

Osceola County

| | |
|---|--------------|
| <i>Year Added to Priority List</i> | 2022 |
| <i>Project Acres</i> | 5,958 |
| <i>Acquired Acres</i> | 45 |
| <i>Remaining Project Acres</i> | 5,913 |
| <i>2025 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i> | \$23,648,419 |

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Gardner Marsh project will help conserve a swath of high-quality ecological communities located between Lake Hatchineha and Lake Kissimmee that protect the headwaters of the Kissimmee River and provide critical habitat for rare and imperiled species. The project will help to complete a corridor of protected conservation lands in a rapidly growing region of the state.

General Description

The Gardner Marsh project is in Osceola County within the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, between Lake Hatchineha and Lake Kissimmee.

Gardner Marsh is characterized by a nearly intact landscape of healthy and diverse natural communities including high quality examples of scrub and dry prairie. The property is actively managed with fire and current land management practices have maintained the quality of the site's natural communities. A multitude of rare and imperiled species are documented or reported on-site including the Florida scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) and the rare nodding pinweed (*Lechea cernua*). Nearly all (99 percent) of the property is located within Priority 2 of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network.

The project is within the Avon Park Air Force Range Sentinel Landscape and the Everglades Headwaters Conservation Partnership Area, an area established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and one of the great grassland and savanna landscapes of eastern North America.

The property has been in the same ownership for several generations and has historically served as ranchland for family cattle operation. The landowners have been working the lands of the Kissimmee Prairie since 1867 when cattle were free ranging on the Osceola Plain. According





to the Florida Department of State’s Division of Historical Resources, there are three archaeological sites located within or intersecting the boundary of the proposed project that collectively contain evidence of pre-Columbian occupations spanning over 3,000 years of Florida history.

Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) Element Occurrence Summary

| <u>FNAI Elements</u> | <u>Score</u> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Gopher tortoise | G3/S3 |
| Swallow-tailed kite | G5/S2 |
| <i>Nodding pinweed*</i> | G3/S3 |
| Bachman's sparrow | G3/S3 |
| Crested caracara | G5/S2 |
| Bald eagle | G5/S3 |
| <i>*Plant species are in italics</i> | |

Public Use

The Gardner Marsh project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition with no public access.

Acquisition Planning

2022

On October 14, 2022, the Acquisition and Restoration Council voted to add the Gardner Marsh project to the 2023 Florida Forever Priority List.

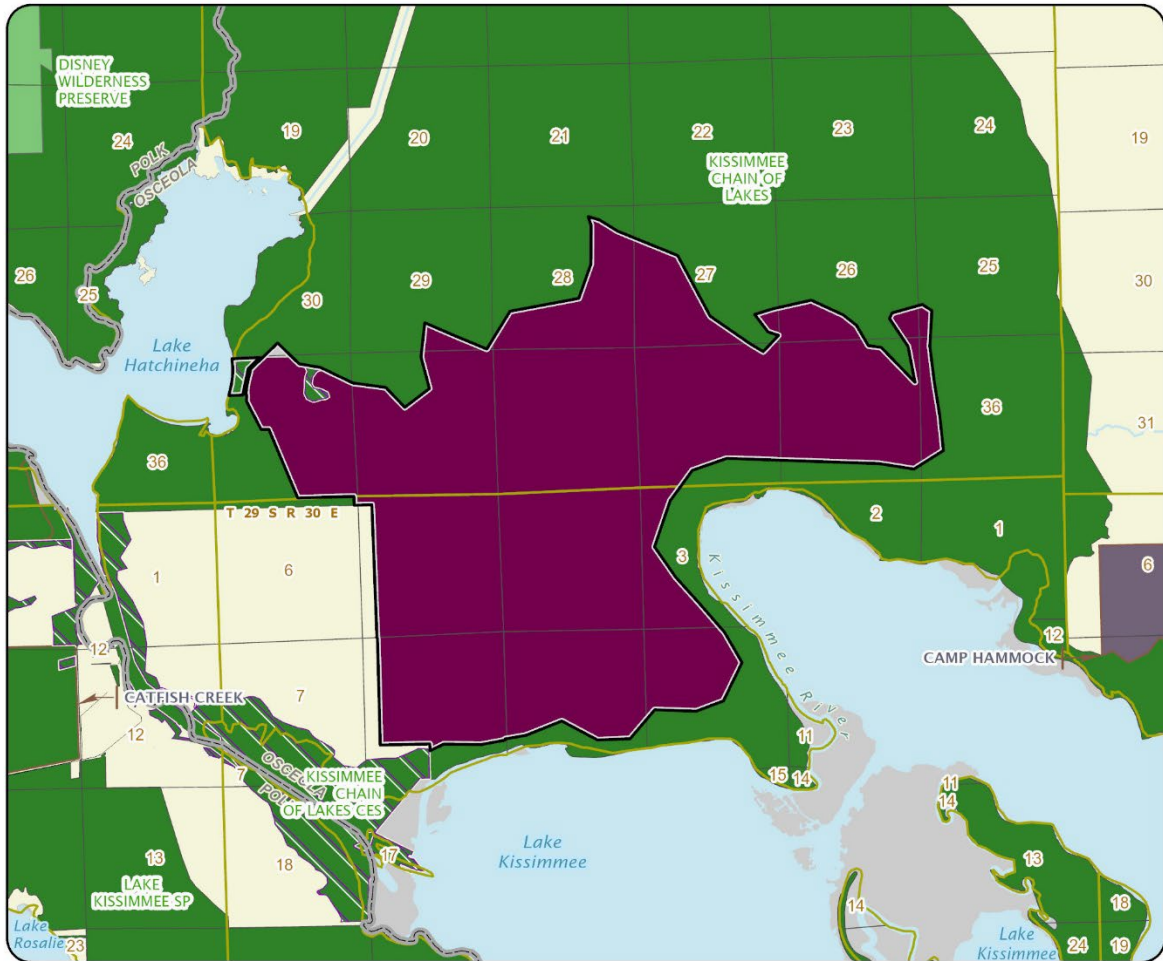
Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Gardner Marsh project would be managed by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

Manager(s)

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of Gardner Marsh would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring to confirm continued conservation easement compliance would be coordinated by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s Division of State Lands.





GARDNER MARSH

OSCEOLA COUNTY

