

# Gooski Prairie

Less-Than-Fee

Marion County

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| <i>Year Added to Priority List</i>            | 2025         |
| <i>Project Acres</i>                          | 12,880       |
| <i>Acquired Acres</i>                         | 0            |
| <i>Remaining Project Acres</i>                | 12,880       |
| <i>2025 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i> | \$46,211,748 |

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Gooski Prairie project would close a strategic gap in an extensive ecological corridor of managed lands connecting the Ocala National Forest northward into southeastern Alachua County. The project would indirectly support outdoor recreation opportunities on nearby public lands by enhancing regional biodiversity within a rapidly growing region of the state. The project would also contribute to the protection of the headwaters of Daisy Creek, a tributary of the Ocklawaha River, which is an Outstanding Florida Waterway.

## General Description

The Gooski Prairie project lies just south of Fort McCoy, 4 miles northeast of Silver Springs. The project shares its southern border with the Heather Island/Ocklawaha River Florida Forever project and the St. Johns River Water Management District's Silver Springs Forest Conservation Area, connecting this property to a network of conservation lands spanning to the Ocala National Forest. The property is currently used for silviculture and cattle ranching. A portion of the property was historically used for a haying operation. The previous landowner, Sleepy Creek Lands, LLC, began the process of converting coniferous plantations to improved pasture with the goal of transitioning to cattle ranching. Gooski LLC has invested significant resources in continuing the improvement of pastures. Improvements are limited to structures related to agricultural operations. The property has an extensive network of internal roads for management access. A utility corridor crosses the site from north to south.

As a working timber operation, the most common landcover type on the property is pine plantation ( $\pm 6,432$  acres), followed by improved pasture ( $\pm 1,679$  acres). Over 1,000 acres of the property is defined as clearing/regeneration; these areas have been clearcut and were largely





not re-planted at the time of the site visit. The landowner plans to create food plots for wildlife in areas that were formerly used as fishponds.

The most notable natural areas within the project are Gooski Prairie and Indian Lake Prairie, both of which contain multiple wetland community types including marsh lake, wet prairie and basin marsh. Gooski Prairie and Indian Lake Prairie are both poljes; large flat-bottomed wetlands that are formed when multiple sinkholes coalesce. The single largest natural community type on-site (541 acres) is wet flatwoods. Additionally, the site includes approximately 15 acres of remnant sandhill in fair condition where multiple gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) burrows and pocket gopher (*Geomys pinetis*) mounds were observed at the time of the site visit.

The Gooski Prairie project is almost entirely (99 percent) within Priority 2 of the Florida Ecological Greenways Network. Imperiled bird species were observed on site during the site assessment, including Florida sandhill crane (*Antigone canadensis pratensis*) and white ibis (*Eudocimus albus*). Additional observations included common songbirds, warblers, frogs and even a bobcat (*Lynx rufus floridanus*).

There are six recorded archaeological or historical sites within the project, cumulatively representing 3,000 years of Florida’s cultural history. One new site was identified during the field review, containing remnant lithic debitage from stone tool production.

Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) Element Occurrence Summary

| <b><u>FNAI Elements</u></b> | <b><u>Score</u></b> |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| Gopher tortoise             | G3/S3               |
| Swallow-tailed kite         | G5/S2               |
| Florida black bear          | G5T4/S4             |
| Florida sandhill crane      | G5T2/S2             |
| Bald eagle                  | G5/S3               |
| Southeastern fox squirrel   | G5T5/S3             |
| Little blue heron           | G5/S4               |

**Public Use**

The Gooski Prairie project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition with no public access.

**Acquisition Planning**

**2025**

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





### Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Gooski Prairie project would be managed for conservation purposes by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

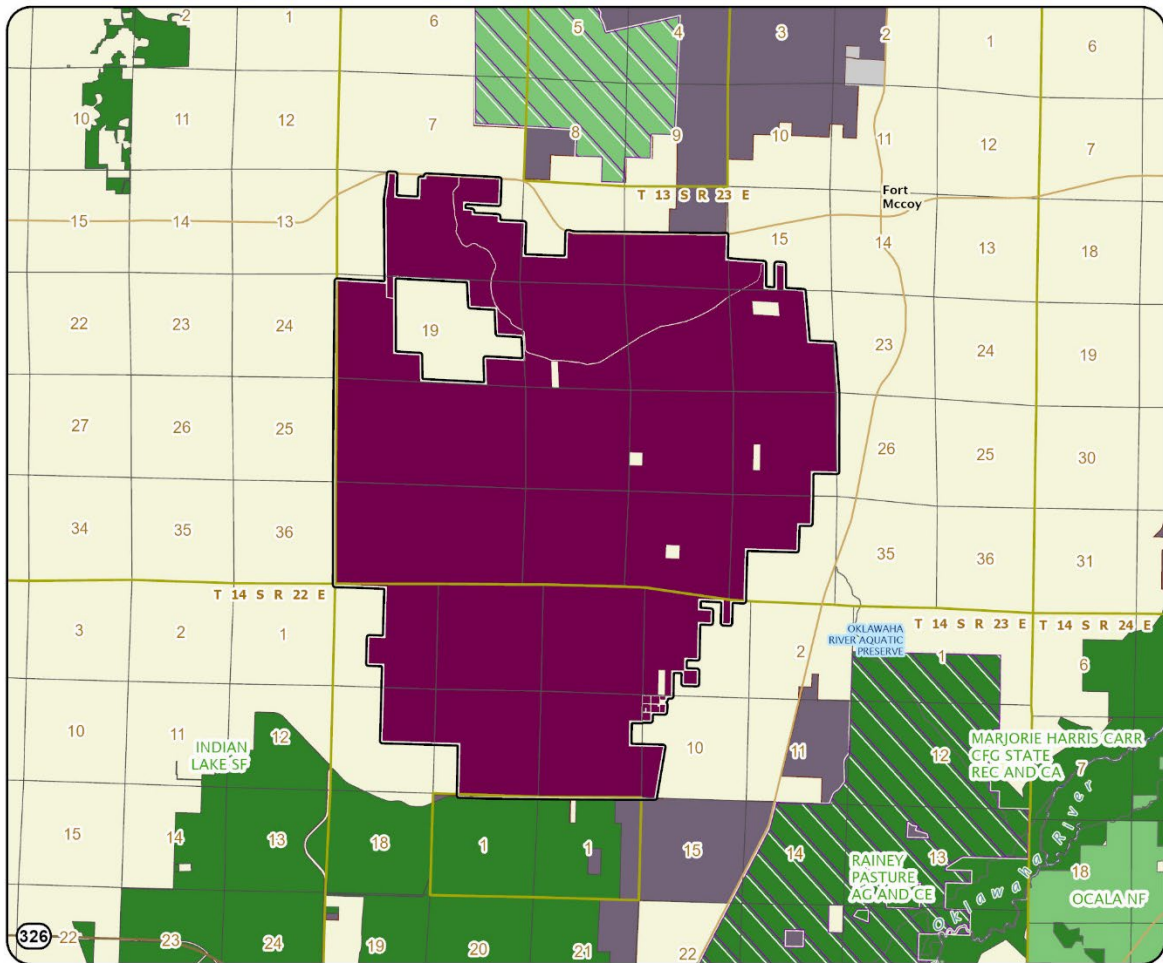
### Manager

If acquired as less-than-fee, management of the Gooski Prairie project would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management to confirm compliance with the conditions of the conservation easement would be coordinated by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Division of State Lands.

### Management Prospectus

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of the Gooski Prairie would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring to confirm continued conservation easement compliance would be coordinated by DEP's Division of State Lands.





### GOOSKI PRAIRIE

#### MARION COUNTY

- Florida Forever Project Boundary\*
  - Essential Parcels Remaining
  - Other Florida Forever Projects
  - State Conservation Lands
  - Other Conservation Lands
  - Other Public Lands
  - Less-Than-Fee Acquisition
  - State Aquatic Preserve
- \*Project boundary has been generalized for map clarity.*

