

Lochloosa Forest

Partnerships and Regional Incentives

Alachua County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	<i>2016</i>
<i>Project Acres</i>	<i>4,693</i>
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	<i>4,693</i>
<i>2025 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	<i>\$5,242,858</i>

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Lochloosa Forest project will help to establish a wildlife corridor along the eastern lakes portion of Alachua County to the Camp Blanding to Raiford Greenway and Lake Santa Fe Florida Forever projects. The project closes a gap between Austin Cary Forest in Gainesville and Balu County Park in Waldo. The project will also contribute to the protection of water resources and important wildlife habitat.

General Description

Lochloosa Forest is an area of upland terraces where flatwoods, swamps and marshes predominate. The project also has two creeks flowing through it: Hatchet Creek from northwest to southeast and Bee Tree Creek from north to south.

Historically, most of the plantation areas supported a mosaic of mesic and wet flatwoods and a few small pockets of sandhill. Wetlands associated with the creek system and scattered dome swamps throughout the plantation make up approximately one-fifth of the site. Bee Tree Creek has several large floodplain swamp wetlands in the eastern part of Lochloosa Forest, the largest being just north of where Bee Tree Creek enters Balu Forest. A large swath of the western side of the swamp and smaller areas north and south totaling nearly 100 acres have been logged in the past for cypress and hardwoods.

Structure and species composition vary considerably between timber stands and generally reflect the amount of heavy shading or severe soil and vegetation disturbances associated with forestry operations. Very little natural groundcover remains in the pine plantations; although many are dominated by native shrubs indicative of the natural communities the pines were planted on. This is especially true of the older stands; younger stands have a very sparse shrub layer as well as a needle-dominated groundcover. One area, located on former sandhill, has





retained some native groundcover, and would greatly benefit from the reintroduction of prescribed fire.

Forested wetlands make up most of the existing natural communities on the property. Bottomland forest is the predominant natural community that borders Hatchet Creek and its tributaries and the narrower parts of Bee Tree Creek. Floodplain swamp is present in the larger wetlands associated with Bee Tree Creek, where the canopy is dominated by cypress.

Numerous dome swamps are scattered throughout the pine plantations. Cypress and hardwoods have been heavily harvested from many of the dome and floodplain swamp natural communities and scattered large stumps can be seen in the bottomland forest, indicative of past logging. Hydrology has been disrupted in some wetlands by ditches that drain formerly isolated dome swamps into the larger creeks.

Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4

Public Use

Because more than 80 percent of the area has been managed over the years as a pine plantation, the fire dependent character of the Lochloosa Forest and the potential for ongoing silviculture may preclude development of recreation access or interpretive facilities. The altered landcover sites may be best suited for restoration, operational support or small-scale education facilities. The ridgeline ecotone and creek system are scenic features of the proposal and offer significant conservation value. Hatchet Creek yields a scenic bottomland forest and basin swamp, which would be well-protected under forest-wide management as an educational “outdoor classroom/laboratory” comparable to the University of Florida’s adjacent Austin Cary Forest. The Austin Cary Forest currently performs the conservation and education functions, which could be fittingly extended to the Lochloosa Forest.

Significant recreational opportunities that may be offered by the acquisition would include hiking, nature interpretation and primitive camping. Integration of teaching opportunities may be feasible with trail development and sustainable recreation management.

Also, managers at the University of Florida’s Austin Cary Forest noted that hunting may be an appropriate compatible multiple use on the tract. The forest manager’s suggestion was to use the activity as part of an educational opportunity for wildlife management studies, and the Florida Forest Service (FFS) noted that it could also be a site for Operation Outdoor Freedom hunts.





Acquisition Planning

2016

Lochloosa Forest was submitted as a much larger project comprising parcels across eastern Alachua County but was redesigned to its current acreage once the perpetual conservation easements that were already acquired and the Weyerhaeuser property were eliminated from the boundary. It was approved as a 4,693-acre project adjoining the Austin Cary Forest. The project was introduced to the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) for evaluation on June 17, 2016, and advanced to the next phase of review.

On October 21, 2016, ARC added the proposal to Florida Forever Priority List. It had a tax assessed value of \$894,300.

Coordination

Partners in funding and in acquiring the Lochloosa Forest are likely to include Alachua County, Alachua Conservation Trust and the University of Florida.

Management Policy Statement

The goals of managing the Lochloosa Forest are to establish a connectivity of managed lands among conservation lands in North Florida that include Balu Forest, Ocala National Forest and Camp Blanding. Lochloosa Forest represents a missing piece needed to create a conservation land corridor in northeast Florida. State acquisition of the site would also allow regional watershed protection and continuation of wildlife corridors, revenue from timber harvests and recreation.

Manager(s)

The University of Florida will manage the site as part of Austin Cary Forest, with emphasis on wildlands education and training. FFS has offered to participate in the management of the forest, if necessary, possibly managing it as part of the Newnan's Lake State Forest. The property was under a timber lease until 2023.

Management Prospectus

Qualifications for State Designation

Lochloosa Forest would support the education, research and public outreach role of the University of Florida. This includes developing diverse conditions for students and professionals learning land management techniques; researchers studying impacts of different land management techniques on hydrology, wildlife, recreation, ecotourism and financial outcomes of management; and for the public to learn about scientific and systematic resource management.





Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

Management of the property was limited through 2023 by the existing timber and hunting leases with the owner of the property. Management intensity can be expected to increase gradually toward the termination of the leases. In keeping with sustainable forestry practices, the pines will be replanted before the lessee cedes the site.

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

The first step of the project would be to develop a management plan among Alachua County and the University of Florida that would meet teaching, research and outreach goals, and guide coordination with the current owner of the land to the termination of the timber leases. The second step would be adjusting reforestation under access limited by the timber leases from 2018 to 2023. The third step would be to fully implement a land-management plan with specific activities to support teaching, research and public access. Because the project is adjacent to Austin Cary Forest, it is anticipated to be secured.

Revenue-generating Potential

The prospective managers estimate that when the existing leases expire in 2023, about 30 percent of the property will have been clear-cut and will need reforestation. Another 30 percent will have timber from 10 to 14 years old, which could provide revenue over the subsequent five years. The remaining 40 percent of the property will have trees less than three years old and not yet of harvestable size.

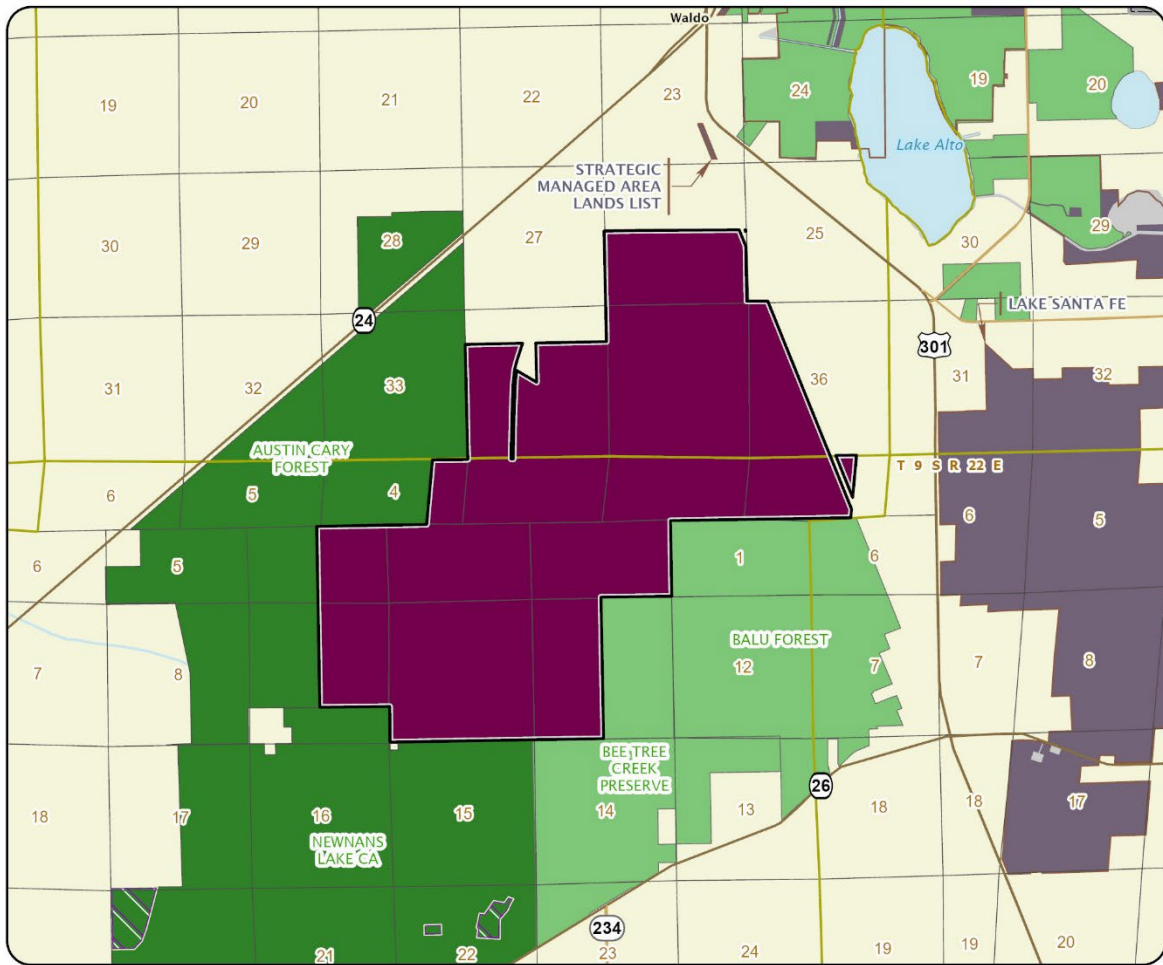
Otherwise, the addition of the Lochloosa Forest to Austin Cary Forest is expected to require one additional technical staff member at an estimated \$40,000 annually and three to five student employees at \$15,000 to \$26,000 annually. The staff would also need about \$10,000 annually in fuel, equipment and operations expenses. The University of Florida would be responsible for these costs, which would be periodically offset with such revenue as timber sales, hunting leases, pine straw harvesting and other sales.

Management Cost Summary

University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences		Annual
Source of Funds		UF/IFAS
Salary		\$40,000
OPS/ Student Employees	\$15,000 -	\$26,000
Expense		\$0
OCO		\$0
TOTAL		\$55,000-\$66,000

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





LOCHLOOSA FOREST

ALACHUA COUNTY

