

Shoal River Buffer

Critical Natural Lands

Okaloosa County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	<i>2010</i>
<i>Project Acres</i>	<i>2,188</i>
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	<i>1,229</i>
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	<i>959</i>
<i>2025 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	<i>\$892,873</i>

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Shoal River Buffer project will protect the water quality of the Shoal River, an Outstanding Florida Water and support landscape connectivity. The project protects habitat for imperiled species such as the Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*) and will provide the public with natural resource-based recreation opportunities.

General Description

The Shoal River Buffer project is proposed as a fee simple acquisition in eastern Okaloosa County. The tract is divided into two distinct parcels east and west of the Shoal River and 5.5 miles from the convergence of the Yellow River. It is bisected by land owned by Okaloosa County that consists of the immediate floodplain bordering the Shoal River. A portion of the western tract is adjacent to Eglin Air Force Base to the south and the city of Crestview to the west. The eastern portion is bordered by Titi Creek to the south and agricultural lands to the north.

Natural communities located within the project include upland hardwood forest, sandhills, mesic/wet flatwoods, floodplain forest, basin swamp and blackwater stream. The site also has intact seepage slopes. The wetland types on both tracts have intact forest cover and are typical for the region. Timber species include oak, cypress, Atlantic white cedar, maple and titi. The upland areas vary from excessively well drained to poorly drained sites. The extremely xeric sites are predominately longleaf pine with scattered sand pine. Understory tree species include typical xeric oaks and shrubs. Mesic sites contain slash, longleaf and loblolly pines with oaks, sweetgum and maple intermixed.

The tract provides Eglin Air Force Base with a critical buffer for both military operations and smoke generated from burning operations on base. The Shoal River Paddling Trail, designated



by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s (DEP) Office of Greenways and Trails, stretches nine and one-half miles through the property with access points north (Ray Barnes Boat Ramp) and southwest (Bill Duggar Jr. Park) of the property.

Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Pygmy sandhill grasshopper	G2/S2
<i>Gulf Coast redflower pitcher plant*</i>	G3G4T2T3/S2S3
<i>Hairy wild indigo*</i>	G3T3/S3
Alligator snapping turtle	G3/S3
Lavender burrowing crayfish	G4/S2
Spiny softshell	G5/S3
Eastern river cooter	G5T5/S3
Purple pigtoe	G3G4/SNR

**Plant species are in italics*

Public Use

As on all lands managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), development of facilities would be kept to the minimum level necessary to assure protection of the resources, while providing for compatible recreation opportunities. Any such minimal development would be confined to areas of previous disturbance. The property has potential for hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, picnicking, primitive camping, nature interpretive trails and geocaching.

Acquisition Planning

2009

On December 11, 2009, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) voted to add this project with a tax assessed value of \$3,841,189 to the 2010 Florida Forever Priority List.

2011

On December 9, 2011, ARC placed this project in the Critical Natural Lands category.

2012

On April 20, 2012, ARC added 80 acres to the project that had been authorized for sale as surplus by the U.S. Forest Service.

Coordination

The U.S. Department of Defense expressed interest in partnering with the state in acquiring this land. Furthermore, the Northwest Florida Water Management District (NFWMD) has





expressed to U.S. Department of Defense that it has interest in 500 acres or more of the property located along the county's riverfront ownership.

Management Policy Statement

The purpose of the project is to protect the water quality of the Shoal River drainage area which harbors rare species; to sustain wildlife in the area, particularly to provide long-term benefits to imperiled species; and to provide natural resource-based recreation opportunities.

Conservation and protection of environmentally unique native habitats along the river that support imperiled and rare species will be an important management goal for the project.

Establishing a prescribed fire management regime would likely be a primary management goal.

Dense stands of regenerated pines will probably need to be thinned before introducing fire.

Manager(s)

FWC is the recommended manager for lands within this project acquired by both the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (BOT) and NFWFMD. NFWFMD has indicated it will convey any lands the agency acquires within this project to the BOT at no cost.

Management Prospectus

Qualifications for State Designation

About 68 percent of the project is habitat for a range of at least three to seven, or more, focal imperiled species. About 76 percent of the Shoal River Buffer tract lies within a designated FWC Strategic Habitat Conservation Area for the Florida black bear, listed as threatened by the state. In addition, the Florida Natural Areas Inventory 2008 GIS data indicates potential habitat for blackmouth shiner (*Notropis melanostomus*), Gulf sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus desotoi*), Eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon couperi*), Escambia map turtle (*Graptemys ernsti*), Florida black bear and red-cockaded woodpecker (*Picooides borealis*). The eastern tract consists mainly of a sandhill and pineland habitat dominated by longleaf pine with scattered sand pine. The understory consists mainly of xeric oaks and shrubs. Several listed species could benefit from ongoing restoration of sandhill habitats within the project boundary. Listed species of concern that utilize sandhills include the southern fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger niger*), southeastern American kestrel (*Falco sparverius paulus*) and gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*). Bears have also been documented utilizing riparian corridors of the Shoal River and its tributaries in Okaloosa County and are well documented on Eglin Air Force Base, a primary breeding range for bears in the state.





Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

The Shoal River Buffer project includes natural areas likely requiring application of resource management activities, such as ecological restoration of ground cover, control of invasive and exotic species, reforestation and prescribed fire. Such activities may be necessary to accomplish management objectives to attain the desired future condition for the area. This is especially important for conservation of habitats and populations of imperiled or rare species. Landscape ecology and management concerns may also need to be considered.

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

During the first year following acquisition, emphasis will be placed on site security, posting boundaries, public access, prescribed fire management, resource inventory, exotic species control and removal of refuse. Within one year, a 10-year management plan will be developed by FWC describing short-term and long-term management goals, and measurable inventory, exotic species control and removal of refuse. Within one year, a 10-year management plan will be developed by FWC describing short-term objectives with associated timelines for completion.

Revenue-generating Potential

The revenue generating potential of the Shoal River Buffer is not known and will depend upon future uses to be approved in the management plan. However, revenue sources might include sales of various permits, recreational user fees and ecotourism activities.

Cooperators in Management Activities

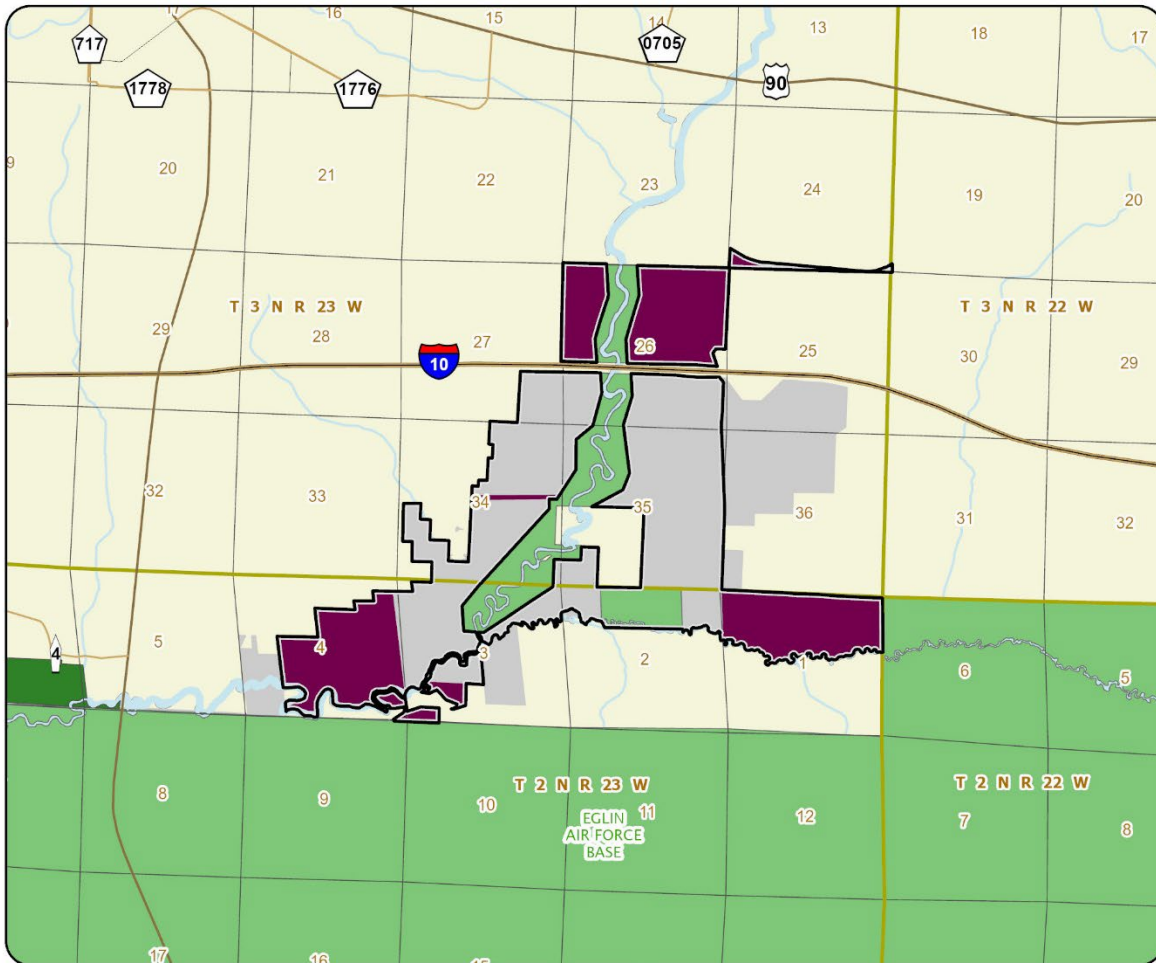
FWC may partner and cooperate with other state and local governmental agencies including DEP, U.S. Department of Defense, the Florida Forest Service, NFWFMD and Okaloosa County in management of the property.

Management Cost Summary

FWC	Startup	Recurring
Source of Funds	Conservation and Recreational Lands (CARL) Program	
Salary	not provided	not provided
OPS	not provided	not provided
Expense	\$45,000	\$38,689
OCO	\$308,899	\$115,101
Total	\$353,899	\$153,790

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





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OKALOOSA COUNTY

