

# St. Marks River Basin

Critical Natural Lands

Wakulla County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2025
<i>Project Acres</i>	4,711
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	4,711
<i>2025 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$14,092,126

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The St. Marks River Basin project will help protect nearly five miles of frontage on the St. Mark's River, sensitive karst features — including Newport Spring and sinkholes — associated with the region as well as enhance the water quality of the St. Marks River and Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve. The project will protect significant cultural resources including the remnants of the historic town of Magnolia and provide opportunities for outdoor resource-based public recreation.

## General Description

The St. Marks River Basin project is located 10 miles south of Tallahassee in eastern Wakulla County, north of Highway 98 and the community of Newport. The western edge of the tract fronts State Road 267 (Bloxxham Cutoff Road) for about 2.4 miles and Old Plank Road bisects the property for about 3 miles. The project is proposed for both fee simple and less-than-fee acquisition. The parcels owned by Walton Accommodations 167 LLC (64 percent of total project) are proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and the parcels owned by Lymmiam Farms LLC (36 percent of total project) are proposed for fee simple acquisition to be managed by Florida Forest Service (FFS). The project is not adjacent to any conservation lands but is less than 5 miles away from San Marcos de Apalache Historic State Park, Tallahassee-St. Marks Historic Railroad Trail State Park, Wakulla State Forest, Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge and Natural Bridge Battlefield State Park.

The project lies within Priorities 1 and 2 of the Florida Ecological Greenway Network and the Woodville Karst Plain, a geologic region characterized by karst features along with remnant dunes and sand ridges resulting from ancient coastal processes. As such, the project includes a





variety of karst features, namely, springs and 4.5 miles of frontage along the St. Marks River, an Outstanding Florida Water. There are two short spring-run streams within the bottomland forests in the project and Newport Spring, a third magnitude sulphur spring, is located along Old Plank Road. Newport Spring, although privately owned, has been a local gathering place for many years.

The primary landcover type found on the property is pine plantation, making up approximately two-thirds of the property. Almost all the timber was harvested 10 years ago and have been re-planted. Bottomland forest is the most extensive natural system within the project, essentially undisturbed and mostly associated with the St. Marks River floodplain. Approximately 53 acres of blackwater stream include part of the main channel as well as the tributaries to the river. According to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory, wet areas that have been cut ( $\pm 405$  acres within basin swamp, dome swamp and a small portion of wet flatwoods) are now classified as successional hydric shrubland/forest. Approximately 400 acres of pine plantation in the northwestern corner of the project is in the process of conversion to improved pasture, which at the time of the site visit had been raked and plowed in preparation for seeding of pasture grasses.

The St. Marks River Basin project could provide habitat for a variety of rare and imperiled species, such as the fontal dwarf crayfish (*Cambarellus schmitti*), Florida manatee (*Trichechus manatus latirostris*) and the Florida black bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*). The landowners have reported seeing bears, manatee, river otter (*Lontra canadensis*) and diversity of common wildlife throughout the property.

Eleven archaeological sites and one historic cemetery, including the site of the former town of Magnolia, are located within the project boundary. The town of Magnolia (1820s-1840s) was significant in the development of Territorial Florida. The Florida Department of State’s Division of Historical Resources notes the possibility of unrecorded archaeological and historical sites, due to the project’s location and inclusion of other sites.

Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Fontal dwarf crayfish	G2G3/S2S3





## Public Use

If acquired in fee, the eastern tract of the St. Marks River Basin will be managed as part of Wakulla State Forest. The western portion of the project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and therefore does not provide public access.

## Acquisition Planning

### **2025**

On April 11, 2025, the Acquisition and Restoration Council voted to add the St. Marks River Basin project to the 2026 Florida Forever Priority List.

## Management Policy Statement

The purpose of acquiring this tract is to conserve forestland in Florida. Additionally, the St. Marks River Basin project contains historic and cultural resources including the extinct city of Magnolia and existing historical cemeteries linking back to when the town was established as a viable river port town on the St. Marks River, circa 1820s. State acquisition of the project would provide water quality protection along the St. Marks River, an Outstanding Florida Waterway.

## Manager(s)

FFS will manage the eastern tract as part of Wakulla State Forest.

## 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 eastern 1,714-acre portion of the St. Marks River Basin project aligns with FFS' management mission. The additional tract is suitable for multiple-use management activities including silviculture, the use of Best Management Practices which will benefit the St. Marks River water quality, public access and recreation, and restoration. Benefits the Wakulla State Forest would gain through the addition of this tract 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 wood industry.





## Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

Most of this tract was harvested approximately 10 years ago and densely reforested with loblolly pine. Prescribed fire should be applied following the first thinning and during the dormant season to reduce pine mortality and to 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 include site security measures, public access and establishing short-term management goals regarding 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 methods such as prescribed fire allow multiple uses, like recreation and habitat management, to blend together 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 on





the river and primitive camping. Public hunting and Operation Outdoor Freedom event opportunities will be evaluated in cooperation with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

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 exist. Additionally, in cooperation with the Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources, historical and cultural assessments, documentation, study, monitoring, future planning and possible interpretation related to the extinct river port of Magnolia and its remnants, as well as historical usage of Newport Spring and the remains of what was reportedly Edward Ball's personal hunt lodge, may be explored. Research may be conducted through cooperation with other governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations and/or educational institutions where feasible.

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**

FFS may work with FWC to develop a wildlife management area and associated hunting seasons and regulations. The Northwest Florida Water Management District may be consulted regarding water resources. The Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources may be consulted regarding historical resources on-site.



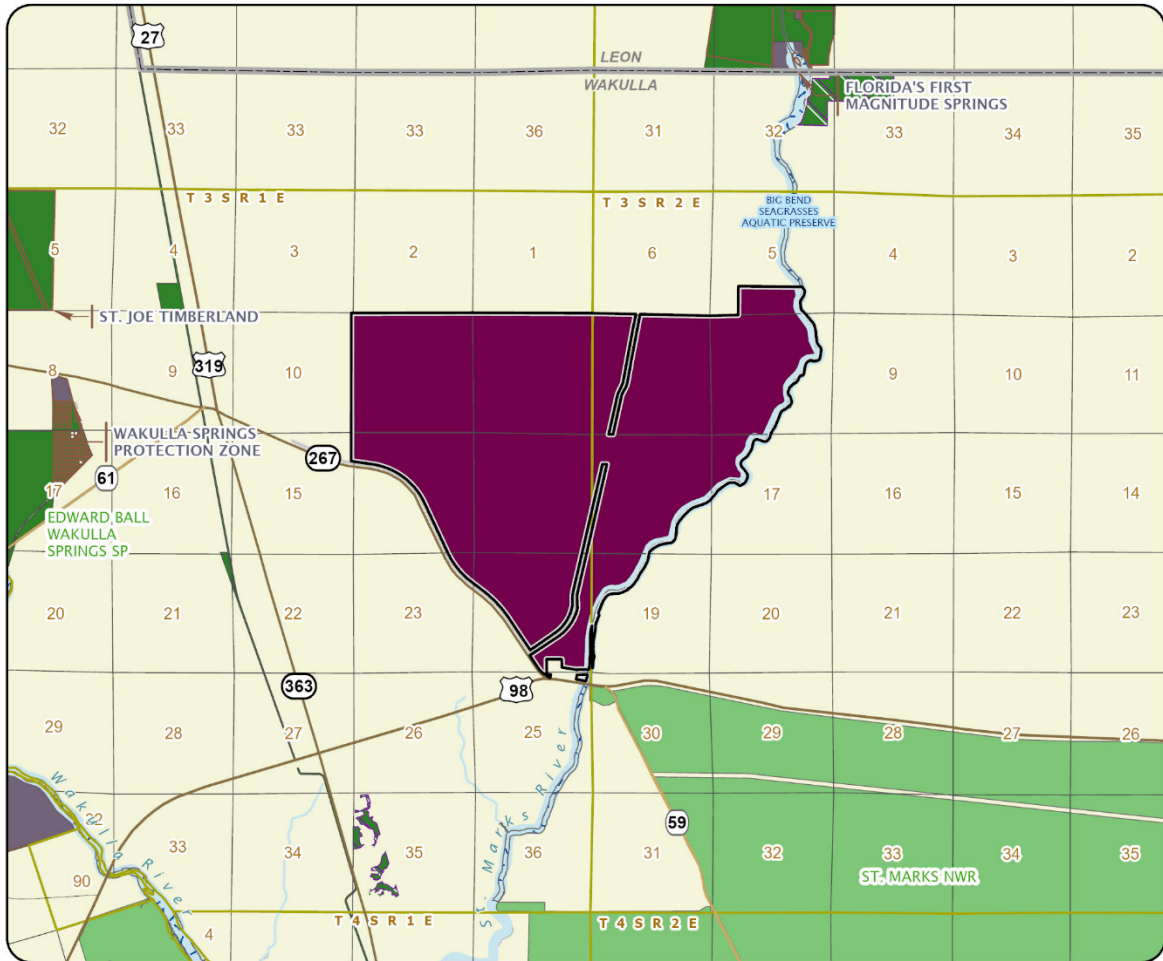


### Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF)	LATF
Salary	not provided	not provided
OPS	not provided	not provided
Resource Management	\$10,000	\$10,000
Capital Improvements	not provided	not provided
Visitor Services/ Recreation	\$2,000	\$2,000
Support	\$50,000	\$8,000
Administration	not provided	not provided
TOTAL	\$62,000	\$20,000

*Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted*





### ST. MARKS RIVER BASIN

#### WAKULLA 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

