

Twelvemile Slough

Critical Natural Lands

Hendry County

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2001
<i>Project Acres</i>	15,968
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	8,717
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	7,251
<i>2025 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$56,579,947

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Twelvemile Slough project will protect an exemplary twelve-mile-long slough, or “river of grass” natural community, that forms a broad band of emergent sedges, grasses and herbs running east through the southern part of the project. The Twelvemile Slough provides important habitat for many species, but particularly those that require extensive areas of habitat to maintain viable populations, such as the Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*).

General Description

The drainage basin of the proposal flows into the Okaloacoochee Slough project acquired by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and Florida Forest Service (FFS). The Okaloacoochee Slough and its associated watershed ultimately flow into the Fakahatchee Strand.





Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Florida panther	G5T1/S1
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Swallow-tailed kite	G5/S2
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
<i>Redmargin zephyrlily*</i>	G2G3/S2S3
Wood stork	G4/S2
Eastern diamondback rattlesnake	G3/S3
Florida burrowing owl	G4T3/S3
Crested caracara	G5/S2
Eastern spotted skunk	G4/S3
Glossy ibis	G5/S3

**Plant species are in italics*

Public Use

The Twelvemile Slough project is primarily a wetland system joining with the Okaloacoochee Slough that could provide excellent opportunities for wildlife and natural resource observation. To achieve maximum potential for these activities, airboats and other motorized equipment that disrupt the quiet atmosphere or disturb wetlands should not be allowed. Other recreational activities could include picnicking, camping, nature study trails, hiking trails and freshwater fishing. Hunting might also be considered appropriate if further review indicates this activity will not have an adverse impact on the property.

Acquisition Planning

2001

On April 6, 2001, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) added the Twelvemile Slough project to Group B of the Florida Forever 2001 Priority List. This fee-simple and less-than-fee acquisition project, sponsored by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), consisted of approximately 14,419 acres, multiple parcels and four landowners (A and M of Hendry County LTD, Richard H. Roberts, Alico Inc. and McClure Properties LTD). The Roberts and Albritton parcels were designated as essential.

2002

On April 25, 2002, ARC approved a fee-simple, 1,416-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by the Department of Environmental Protection’s Division of State Lands and consisted of one owner, McClure Properties LTD. The landowner, with property already in the original boundary, requested the remainder of his ownership be added.





In June 2002, the state acquired 7,486 acres (Albritton tract) with Florida Forever Land Acquisition Program funds of \$11 million to be managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) as the Spirit-of-the-Wild Wildlife Management Area.

2003

In December 2003, an additional 160-acre northern tract was acquired.

2006

On June 9, 2006, ARC moved this project to Group A of the 2006 Florida Forever Priority List.

2008

In May 2008, a correction to the boundary was warranted and the 160 acres of land purchased in 2003 was officially incorporated into the Spirit-of-the-Wild Wildlife Management Area boundary.

2011

On April 15, 2011, ARC recommended an 87-acre boundary reduction for land occupied by residential development, commercial buildings or infrastructure.

On May 27, 2011, a donation of 310.08 acres was received from AGBLLC of Florida as the result of panther mitigation. FFS will manage this property as part of Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest.

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

Coordination

There is some potential for cost sharing with SFWMD and TNC.

Management Policy Statement

The principal purposes of the project are to protect habitat important to the Florida panther and other species of concern, as well as to preserve the hydrologic connection between protected lands to the east and south. The project should be managed under the multiple-use concept whenever possible; management activities should be directed first toward conservation of resources and second toward carefully controlled consumptive uses. Managers should control access to the project, thoroughly inventory resources and monitor management activities to ensure that they are conserving site resources. Managers should limit educational and recreational facilities, ensure that they avoid the most sensitive resources and site them in already disturbed areas when possible.





Manager(s)

FWC is recommended as lead manager. FFS is recommended as a cooperating agency.

Management Prospectus

This project is part of the larger Okaloacoochee Slough wetlands that partially serve as headwaters of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve and Big Cypress National Preserve. The land in this project serves to protect groundwater and habitat for species like the Florida panther and snail kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*). Strategic habitat conservation areas for some of these species comprise roughly a quarter of the project lands. The entire length of the eastern boundary of the project is contiguous with the 32,162-acre Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest/Wildlife Management Area. The following purposes should guide development of management goals: assessing current land use and natural resources to determine existing conditions and future requirements for inventory and monitoring; conserving, protecting and restoring cultural resources, landscapes, forests, water resources and other elements important to ecosystem functions; conserving, protecting and restoring characteristic biological diversity original to natural communities, including protecting, maintaining or enhancing conditions for rare, threatened and endangered species; developing and adapting project plans, procedures and techniques for improved success in meeting management goals, including the Florida Panther Habitat Preservation Plan; and establishing multiple-use natural resource-based recreation opportunities that are compatible, and which are consistent with the other resource conservation purposes and management goals for the area.

Qualifications for State Designation

The Twelvemile Slough project has the resource diversity to qualify as a wildlife management and environmental area. In 2002, a portion acquired became the Spirit-of-the-Wild Wildlife Management Area.

Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management

Biotic surveys should be a priority, since there are potentially many rare or listed species. Some portions of the Twelvemile Slough proposal include lands that are low-need tracts, requiring basic resource management including the frequent use of prescribed fire where appropriate. However, because 57 percent of the uplands have been developed for agriculture or other purposes, significant restoration activities are proposed for at least some of this acreage. The primary management needed for perpetuation of the less disturbed natural communities would involve hydrological restoration, re-establishing native groundcover, exotic vegetation control, prescribed fire and control of conservation-compatible access by the user community.





Proposed uses of the area include opportunities for hunting, camping, hiking, environmental and cultural resource education and other recreation activities. Since the principal purpose of the project is to protect habitat for the Florida panther and other species of concern, management goals will be oriented to conservation and protection of these species and to education and regulation of the user community. Development of facilities would be kept to the minimum level necessary to assure a high-quality recreational experience; any such development would be confined to areas of previous disturbance.

Restoration would be guided by established procedures and techniques, improved through adaptive management themes, and would emphasize re-establishing native plant communities on pasture and hydrological restoration. Infestations of invasive exotic species, including Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolia*), water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) and tropical soda apple (*Solanum viarum*), occur within the area. There will be efforts to eradicate or control the infestations to reduce the potential for further spread.

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

During the first year after acquisition, emphasis will be on site security, posting boundaries, relationships with stakeholders, public-use assessments, fire management, resource inventories, exotic species control and removing refuse. A conceptual management plan, developed by FWC with a stakeholder-based management advisory group, will specify management goals and objectives.

Longer-range activities would focus on meeting goals and objectives in the conceptual management plan. They include prescribed fire, habitat restoration, protecting or propagating critical habitat for listed species and expanding recreation opportunities. Essential roads would be stabilized and maintained for public and management access. Floral and faunal inventories and evaluations of the management projects would be continually updated by FWC biologists and would be supplemented as available with data from other sources. Timber resources consist of South Florida slash pine in areas of mesic flatwoods.

To meet wildlife habitat management objectives, sustainable timber harvests will be conducted using acceptable silviculture practices in consultation with FFS. Environmentally sensitive areas will be identified, and appropriate protective measures will be implemented on those areas. Unnecessary roads, fire lanes and hydrological disturbances will be abandoned or restored as practical.

Minimal infrastructure development will be required to allow public access, provide facilities for the public and provide security and management of the property.





Estimate of revenue-generating potential

Currently, forest products production is limited on the project area. Revenue would be from sales of hunting licenses, fishing licenses, wildlife management area stamps and other special hunting stamps. Some future revenues might be from other nature-based recreation opportunities and cattle-grazing contracts. About 13 percent of the project is pine flatwoods that could be managed to offset operational costs. But future revenue from timber resources will depend on appropriate plant-community and hydrologic restoration. FWC will cooperate with federal, state and local government agencies and non-government organizations, to the greatest extent possible. It is anticipated that FWC will need the most assistance and cooperation from the following: FWC will require three full-time positions to manage this area and will contract with various private entities to procure services and materials to conduct resource management, capital improvements and visitor services within the project.

Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Salary	not provided	not provided
OPS	not provided	not provided
Expense	\$565,196	\$51,763
OCO	\$707,740	\$499,239
TOTAL	\$1,272,936	\$551,002

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





TWELVEMILE SLOUGH

HENDRY COUNTY

