

# Bear Creek Forest

Critical Natural Lands

Bay, Calhoun, Gulf

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2004
<i>Project Acres</i>	100,462
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	3,028
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	97,434
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$93,771,197

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Bear Creek Forest project will establish the Northwest Florida Ecological Greenway, a proposed system of natural areas forming a significant corridor connection between state, federal and non-profit conservation lands in the central Florida Panhandle. The project will increase the protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community and landscape levels through the protection, restoration and maintenance of the quality and natural functions of Florida's land, water and wetlands ecosystems. The project will ensure that enough quantities of water are available to meet the current and future needs of natural ecosystems and the public.

## General Description

The Bear Creek project is located in Calhoun, Bay and Gulf Counties, Florida. This landscape consists of numerous pine plantations that are interspersed with disturbed wet prairies and forested wetlands including baygalls, dome swamps, basin swamps and floodplain swamps. The site also contains upland forest types including sandhill, scrubby and mesic flatwoods. The Bear Creek Florida Forever project is six miles southeast of the Econfina Creek Water Management Area NFWMD, six miles north of Tyndall Air Force Base, and 2.3 miles southwest of the Middle Chipola River Florida Forever project. The Chipola Experimental Forest, managed by the USFS, is adjacent to the project on its northwest side near SR 20.

### FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Reticulated flatwoods salamander	G2/S1
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>dark-headed hatpins</i>	G1/S1
<i>pinewoods aster</i>	G1/S1
<i>Godfrey's butterwort</i>	G2/S2
Yellow-sided clubtail	G2/S2
<i>mock pennyroyal</i>	G2G3/S2S3
<i>giant water cowbane</i>	G3/S3
Bachman's sparrow	G3/S3
<i>primrose-flowered butterwort</i>	G3G4/S3
Southeastern weasel	G5T4/S3?

#### Public Use

Public use will include resource-based recreation and educational opportunities. FFS anticipates that interpretive and user services recreation facilities will be developed and the use of low impact, rustic facilities will be stressed. The project is accessible from public roadways and near a major urban area, Panama City.

#### Acquisition Planning

##### **2004**

On June 4, 2004, the ARC added the Bear Creek Forest project to Group B of the Florida Forever 2004 Interim Priority list. This fee-simple project, sponsored by the FFS and TNC, consisted of approximately 104,461 acres, with a single owner, the Great Western Timber Company.

The essential parcels were identified as the Great Western Timber Company ownership, a willing seller, interested in exploring possible options regarding less-than-fee purchases, fee purchases with deed restrictions or other management agreements as mutually beneficial. In 2004, the project had an estimated tax assessed value of \$15,041,536.

##### **2005**

On January 27, 2005, ARC moved the project to Group A of the 2005 priority list. On June 3, 2005 ARC moved the project to Group B of the 2005 interim priority list.

##### **2011**

On December 9, 2011, ARC placed this project into the Florida Forever category of Critical Natural Lands projects.

#### Coordination

FFS and TNC are acquisition partners.



### **Management Policy Statement**

The principal purposes of the project include protection of biodiversity, and provision of resource-based public recreation and educational opportunities; and management would be oriented to conserving and protecting wildlife species, and careful control of public uses.

### **Manager**

FFS

### **Management Prospectus**

#### **Qualifications for state designation**

Most of the acreage of this project consists of slash and loblolly pine plantations. Some of the pine plantations have been bedded, but several areas still have native groundcover and understory species. With thinning, introduction of prescribed fire, and sustainable forestry management practices, the project could be quickly transformed from silviculture to an area managed for ecological and recreational benefits. The project's size and diversity make it desirable for use and management as a state forest.

#### **Conditions affecting intensity of management**

Much of the project's flatwoods, hardwood forest and sandhill areas have been disturbed by silviculture operations and will require restoration efforts. Areas where timber species are off-site may require thinning or removing trees to help regenerate native ground covers and canopy.

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

Public access will be immediately provided for low intensity outdoor recreation activities such as hunting and fishing. FFS proposes to manage the site as a state forest and will carry out management activities and coordinate public access and use. The FFS will cooperate with other state agencies, local government entities and interested parties as appropriate. Expenditures are going to be needed on this parcel for prescribed fire, vegetative and hydrologic restoration, improved public access/use, and facilities, both public and administrative. It is anticipated that some of the existing roads and trails may be used as multi-use trails for hiking, horseback riding and biking.

#### **Revenue-generating potential**

Timber sales will be conducted as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions. These sales will primarily take place in planted pine stands and will provide a variable source of revenue dependent upon a variety of factors. Due to the existing condition and volume of the timber resources on the property, revenue generating potential of this property is expected to be moderate. Some revenues might be realized in the future from recreational user fees and ecotourism activities, if such projects could be economically developed.

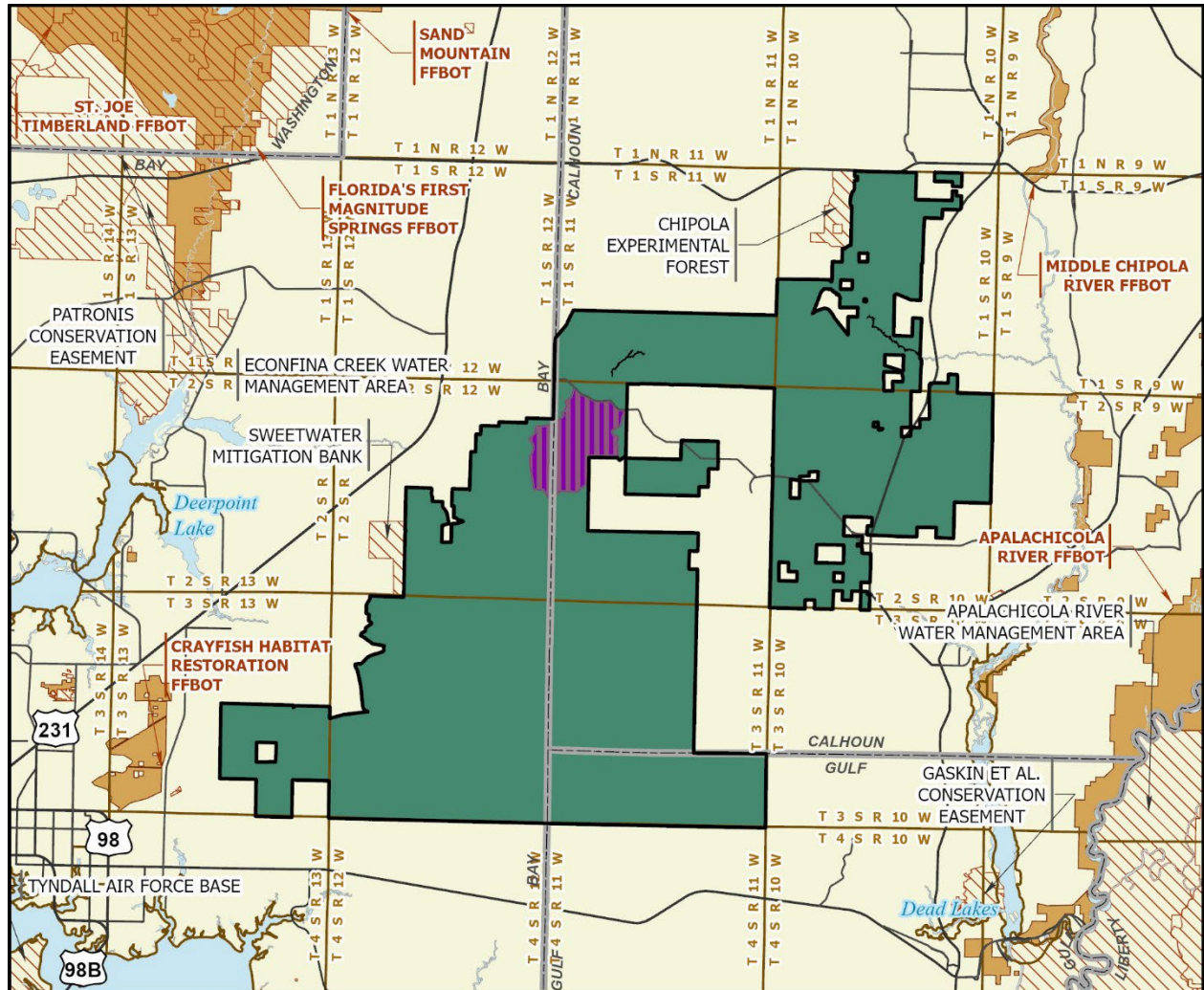


Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	LATF	not provided
Salary (9 FTE)	\$293,345	not provided
Expense	\$797,000	not provided
OCO	\$852,260	not provided
TOTAL	\$1,942,605	not provided

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted

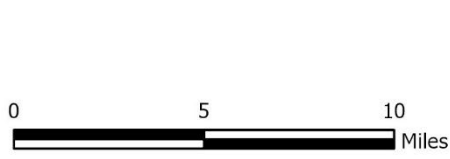




### BEAR CREEK FOREST

#### BAY, CALHOUN, AND GULF COUNTIES

-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Acquired for Conservation (Less-Than-Fee)
-  Essential Parcel(s) Remaining
-  State Owned Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects



FEBRUARY 2021

Map 1: FNAI, February 2021