

Belle Meade

Critical Natural Lands

Collier

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	1993
<i>Project Acres</i>	27,786
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	22,861
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$38,403,758
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	4,925
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$66,835,623

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Belle Meade project will conserve the westernmost large natural area remaining in southwest Florida and preserve the quality of the subtropical estuary of Rookery Bay. The undeveloped cypress swamps and old-growth slash pine flatwoods in the Belle Meade project are a significant component of the Rookery Bay watershed and provide important habitat for endangered wildlife such as Florida panthers, red-cockaded woodpeckers, and Florida black bear. The project will provide resource-based recreation opportunities for residents and visitors of a rapidly urbanizing southwest Florida.

General Description

This project includes some of the most extensive examples of old-growth wet flatwoods (hydric pine flatwoods) in southwest Florida and high quality, undisturbed subtropical dwarf cypress savanna communities. The hydrology of the hydric pine flatwoods and dwarf cypress communities within the project is relatively intact and these natural communities are vulnerable to hydrological disturbance.

The project will protect habitat for at least 20 FNAI-listed plants and animals, including the Florida panther, red-cockaded woodpecker, and Florida black bear. Three archaeological sites have been recorded within the project boundaries and other sites may be present. The project is threatened by residential and commercial development spreading from Naples.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Florida panther	G5T1/S1
Red-cockaded woodpecker	G3/S2
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
<i>ghost orchid</i>	G1/S1
<i>narrow-leaved Carolina scalystem</i>	G4T2/S2
<i>fuzzy-wuzzy air-plant</i>	G4/S1
<i>cowhorn orchid</i>	G5?/S1
<i>powdery catopsis</i>	G5?/S1
<i>tailed strap fern</i>	G5/S1
<i>hand fern</i>	G4/S2
<i>banded wild-pine</i>	G5/S3

Public Use

The project will provide a state forest with uses such as hiking, hunting and nature appreciation. Uses will be limited during the wet seasons.

Acquisition Planning

1992

On December 10, 1992, the LAAC added the Belle Meade project to the CARL Priority list. This fee simple acquisition sponsored jointly by what was then the Department of Natural Resources and by the Conservancy, Inc., consisted of approximately 40,846 acres, 762 parcels, 504 landowners, and a 1991 taxable value of \$62,933,000.

1994

On July 20, 1994, the LAAC deleted a ± 11,985-acre area of the project, at the request of DEP staff. The cut covers the area north of I-75 from the project. It also removes the Collier property and the property to the south adjacent to SR 951 from the project. The approximate taxable value of the deletion was \$18,465,769 based on the 1991 value.

On December 7, 1994, the LAAC was presented with and approved the revised project boundary which reduced the total acreage of the current boundary from 23,500 to 17,800 acres. The revised boundary included two additions to the current project boundary, approximately 640 acres in the southwest corner and 160 acres in the southeast corner. Approximately 500 landowners remain in the revised boundary; close to 41 percent are owners of tracts 10 acres or less in size; 53 percent are owners of tracts greater than 100 acres.

1995

On July 14, 1995, the LAAC approved a fee-simple, 2,220-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by the three landowners and consisted of 20 parcels. The acreage was included in the original project boundary, but later deleted during the redefinition of the project boundary by the Belle Meade Work Group appointed by the Council in 1994. The Work Group consisted of landowners,



representatives of local government, the water management district, state agencies and others with local expertise. The boundary recommended by the Work Group included primarily willing sellers – approximately 500 ownerships.

1996

On July 16, 1996, the LAAC approved a fee-simple, 1,240-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by eight landowners and consisted of nine parcels. On October 30, 1996, the LAAC approved a “Landowner Request Zone” (in effect, all tracts considered on July 16, 1996). The zone defined areas in which a landowner may request inclusion in the boundary in writing. Highest priority must be given to parcels within the LAAC approved December 1994 boundaries.

2006

On June 9, 2006, the ARC moved this project from Group B to Group A on the August 2006 Florida Forever priority list.

On November 20, 2006, FNAI removed 490 acres from the project boundary in compliance with the November 15, 2000 request of private landowners Howard N. Galbut and Gary R. Edwards (Galbut property data provided by Dan Jones of Southern Mapping Technology November 15, 2006, and Edwards property data derived from the February 14, 2000 removal request letter and property appraiser digital boundaries).

2007

In September 2007, The Conservancy of Southwest Florida donated 147 acres (value of \$2,310,000).

2009

On October 9, 2009, approximately 650 acres were donated by Estates at Twin Eagles, LTD (no value listed). FFS agreed to manage all acres.

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2010

On August 13, 2010, the ARC approved a 348-acre (\$19,232,935 just value) reduction to the boundary because of commercial development and infrastructure.

2011

In August 2011, Citigate Development donated 86.34 acres in Picayune Strand State Forest. This donation, valued at \$274,785, was to be managed by FFS.

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

2020

Mr. Bernard F. Gallagher, Jr. donated 1.29 acres in August 2020 in Picayune Strand State Forest with a donation value of \$4,567.00.



2021

DEP purchased 5.13 acres from the Estate of Brigida Gargiulo Green that will be managed by FFS as an addition to Picayune Strand State Forest

Coordination

Recent acquisition partners include The Conservancy of Southwest Florida.

Management Policy Statement

The primary goals of management of the Belle Meade project are to conserve and protect unaltered wet flatwoods and cypress swamps that provide significant habitat for many rare and endangered species of wildlife, including the Florida panther. Other goals are to conserve and restore these important ecosystems, their significant wildlife resources, and their critical hydrological connection to the Gulf Coast by fee-simple purchase. The project will be managed under the multiple-use concept, with management activities directed toward protecting old-growth forests (using growing-season burns where necessary) and restoring natural surface water flows. The project, when completed, will link Collier-Seminole State Park and the future Picayune Strand State Forest and will approach the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve; it will be large enough to achieve the primary management goals.

Manager (s)

FFS is recommended as manager.

Management Prospectus**Qualifications for state designation**

The Belle Meade project has the forest resources (extensive areas of old-growth South Florida slash pine) and the location (twelve miles of common border with the Picayune Strand) to make it highly suitable for management as a state forest.

Conditions affecting intensity of management

Portions of the project may require hydrological restoration, but these activities will probably be conducted by the water management district. No other known disturbances that will require extraordinary attention are known. FFS expects its management efforts to be typical for a state forest.

Management implementation, Public access, Site security and Protection of infrastructure

After the core area is acquired, FFS will provide access for low intensity outdoor recreation. Initial activities include securing the site, providing public and fire management access, inventorying resources, and removing trash.

The sites' natural resources and threatened and endangered plants and animals will be inventoried to develop a management plan. Long-range plans for this project are to restore disturbed areas to their original conditions, as far as possible, as well as protecting threatened and endangered species. Some of the pinelands have been degraded by timbering and require restoration.



An all-season burning program will use, whenever possible, existing roads, black lines, foam lines and natural breaks to contain fires. Timber management will mostly involve improvement thinning and regeneration harvests. Plantations will be thinned and, where appropriate, reforested with species found in natural ecosystems. Stands will not have a targeted rotation age. Infrastructure will primarily be in disturbed areas and will be the minimum required for management and public access. The Division will promote environmental education. Budget needs for interim management are covered under the Save Our Everglades/Golden Gate Project.

Revenue-generating potential

FFS will sell timber as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions. These sales will provide a variable source of revenue, but FFS expects the revenue-generating potential for this project to be low.

Cooperators in management activities

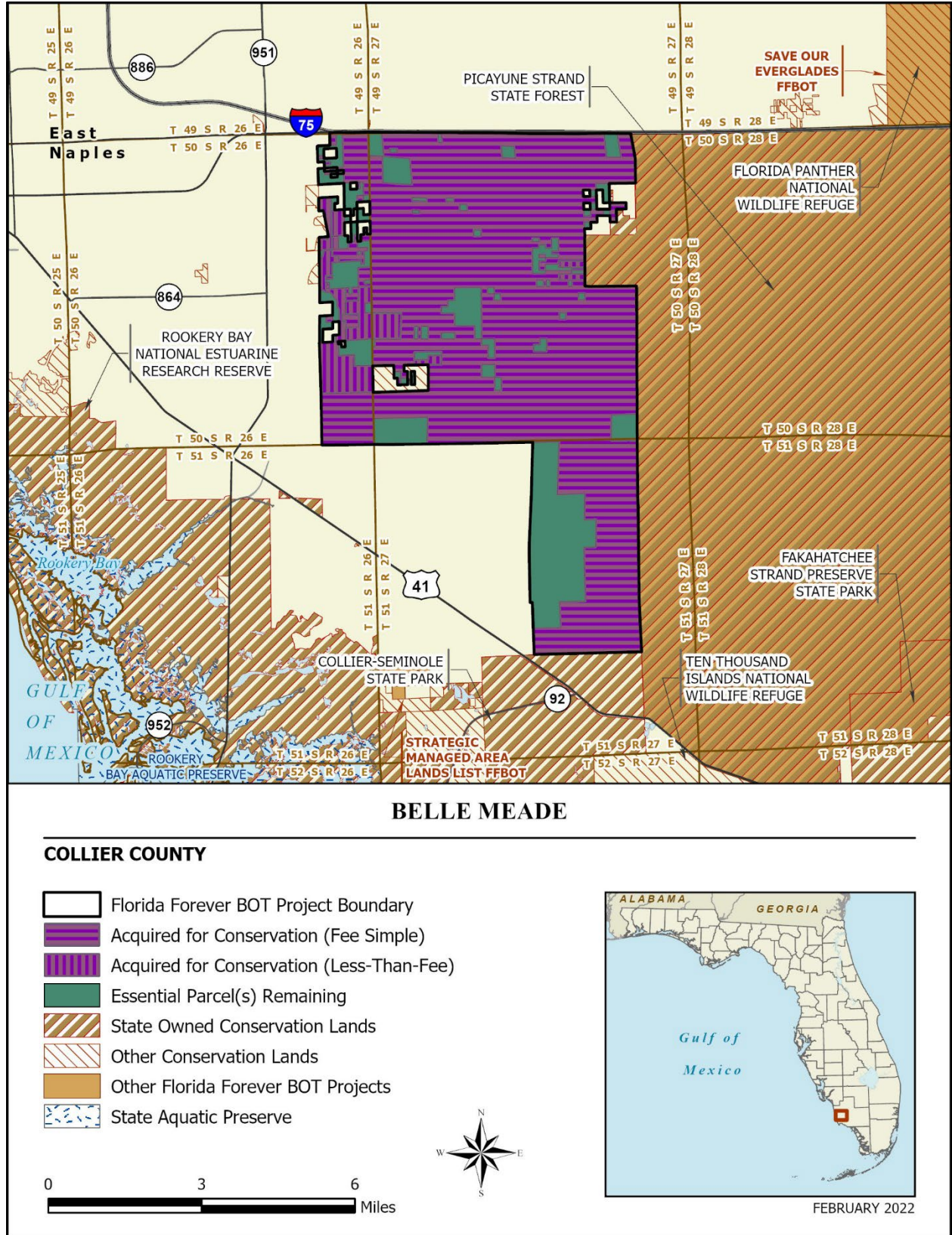
FFS will cooperate with and seek the assistance of other state agencies, local government entities and interested parties as appropriate.

Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	LATFLATF	
Salary	\$0	\$0
OPS	\$9,140	\$9,140
Expense	\$0	\$0
OCO	\$44,000	\$0
FCO	\$0	\$0
TOTAL	\$53,140	\$9,140

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





Map 1: FNAI, February 2022