

Big Bend Swamp/Holopaw Ranch

Less-Than-Fee

Osceola

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2000
<i>Project Acres</i>	52,510
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	11,662
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$21,548,060
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	40,848
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$176,887,226

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Big Bend Swamp project will protect and maintain a link of natural lands between the Bull Creek and Three Lakes WMA. Numerous species of unique wildlife live in the expanses of palmetto prairies, pine flatwoods, and cypress swamps in Osceola County such as the crested caracara, red-cockaded woodpeckers, sandhill cranes, and other wildlife that require these large natural areas. This project may also help complete the Florida National Scenic Trail, a statewide non-motorized trail that crosses several Florida Forever project sites.

General Description

The Big Bend Swamp project includes a diverse range of natural environments native to central Florida. Natural communities within the project are in good condition because the uplands have been managed and burned regularly. Mesic flatwoods and dry prairie cover 40 percent of the project area. These communities are interrupted by Big Bend Swamp, which is a large cypress-dominated strand swamp, and smaller dome swamps, depression marshes, wet prairies, and hydric hammocks. Fire-suppressed scrub also occurs in patches throughout the property. Disturbed areas, largely improved pasture or sod farms cover 18 percent of the project. The Big Bend Swamp may be particularly important for up to 30 rare animal species that require large areas of flatwoods, prairie, and wetlands, such as red-cockaded woodpeckers, Florida sandhill cranes, Florida grasshopper sparrows, Sherman's fox squirrels, swallow-tailed kites, and crested caracaras.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Red-cockaded woodpecker	G3/S2
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Crested caracara	G5/S2
<i>narrowleaf naiad</i>	G3/S2

Public Use

Big Bend Swamp/Holopaw Ranch is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access. As a proposed WMA this project will provide a variety of multiple-use activities including hunting, fishing, camping, boating, hiking, horseback riding, environmental education, ecotourism, and other natural resource-based recreational activities. Public use will depend on agreements with landowners.

Acquisition Planning

1999

On December 9, 1999, the LAMAC added the Big Bend Swamp/Holopaw Ranch project to the Less-Than-Fee group of the CARL 2000 Priority list.

This less-than-fee project, sponsored by FNAI, consisted of approximately 56,710 acres with multiple owners. While primarily a less-than-fee acquisition, full fee will be considered in the subdivision.

The essential parcels were identified as Bronson, Partin, Ridgewood Ranch, Oberry, Gannarelli, Whaley, Lee Ranch, and Smith.

2002

On April 25, 2002, the ARC approved a less-than-fee addition of 5,714 acres to the project boundary. The addition, sponsored by Holland and Knight Consulting, consisted of one owner, Birchwood Acres Limited Partnership.

2007

In June 2007, Osceola County acquired, and will manage, the 342-acre Camp Lonesome Ranch property. In November 2007, Osceola County purchased an additional 2,100 acres that will be managed as part of the Camp Lonesome Ranch Conservation Area.

2010

In April 2010, the ARC voted to remove 7,722 acres from the boundary because they have already been developed with residential and commercial structures.

2011

On December 9, 2011, the ARC placed this project into the Florida Forever category of Less-than-Fee projects.



2017

On August 16, 2017, the Florida Cabinet, acting as the BOT approved a 1,100-acre conservation easement on the Camp Lonesome tract of this project.

In calendar year 2017, a total of 1,109.68 acres in this project were acquired using Florida Forever program funding.

2019

On June 14, 2019, the ARC voted to remove 4,255 acres from the project boundary after receiving a certified letter from the owner(s) requesting its removal.

Coordination

Osceola County is an acquisition partner in this project.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Big Bend Swamp/Holopaw ranch would be managed for conservation purposed by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement. The Big Bend Swamp / Holopaw Ranch proposal has the resource diversity to qualify as a wildlife management area. The FWC is recommended as lead manager, with the FFS as a cooperating manager.

Manager(s)

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management to confirm continued compliance with the conditions of the conservation easement would be coordinated by OES.

Management Prospectus

OES will periodically monitor the conservation easement, while the management will be conducted by the property owner.

Conditions affecting intensity of management

The lands within this proposal are low-need tracts, requiring basic resource management, including the use of frequent prescribed fire. However, special precautions and frequent coordination will be necessary for any contemplated hydrological and plant community restoration projects, and for prescribed burning activities since ranchers and other landowners will continue to maintain a presence on many of these properties. Additionally, if negotiated provisions allow, some low-level public-use activities may be allowed on lands acquired under conservation easements.

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

During the first year of management after acquisition, emphasis will be placed on securing and posting boundaries, assuring public access to the tract, surveying wildlife and plant communities, using prescribed fire, and establishing relationships with adjacent landowners. A management plan for the tract will be prepared, including forming an appropriate Management Advisory Group with stakeholders in the management of these lands. Long- range activities on the property will include securing and



stabilizing roads for public access, developing hiking / horseback riding trails, and developing camping and nature interpretive programs that key on facilities being provided on the adjacent Three Lakes WMA. An all-season prescribed burning program will be established. Whenever possible, existing roads, trails and firebreaks will be used to control both prescribed and natural fires. Infrastructure development will be kept to the minimum required to allow public access, provide facilities, and manage the property. Also, for the long term, FWC will try to maintain and establish rapport with landowners adjacent to the WMA; provide technical assistance and advice in order to assure the welfare of such ecosystem components as wetlands; and establish working relationships with local representatives of regulatory agencies such as WMDs, counties, DEP, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This would ensure solutions if conflicts arise.

Floral and faunal inventories will be continually updated by FWC biologists with observations and systematic surveys. Inventory data will be supplemented as available with data from other sources which may include, but not be limited to, FWS, DRP, FFS, FNAI, TNC, WMDs, or other private contractors.

Over the long-term, some previously disturbed sites will be restored or managed to specifically benefit wildlife species that thrive in early successional plant communities. Selected sites may be planted with native or non-invasive agronomic plants to:

- provide dove hunting opportunities;
- provide high quality forage for quail, dove, deer, and wild turkey; and / or
- to enhance wildlife viewing opportunities.

Revenue-generating potential

Much of the proposed area is current or former ranch lands and mesic flatwoods with scattered longleaf or slash pine. Some revenues might be generated on fee-simple portions of the acquisition by stocking cattle, or with timber management by means of a wildlife-oriented forest management plan developed with the assistance of the Division of Forestry. Also, fees could be established for touring the area to view the plant and animal communities through ecotourism programs being developed on the adjacent WMA. A \$25 wildlife management area stamp would be required to hunt on the portions of the area acquired in fee simple. For areas where only conservation easements are acquired, FWC will be bound by negotiations between landowners and DSL. However, if negotiated provisions allow, there may be some opportunities on these lands for generating revenues from low-level hunting activities such as quota hunts, or special-opportunity hunts. Funding of requisite positions, OPS, expenses and OCO would come from the CARL Trust Fund, and the State Game Trust Fund as needed. Since these lands are adjacent to an existing land complex being managed by FWC, initial staffing would be limited to one Biological Scientist III and one Fish and Wildlife Technician.



Cooperators in management activities

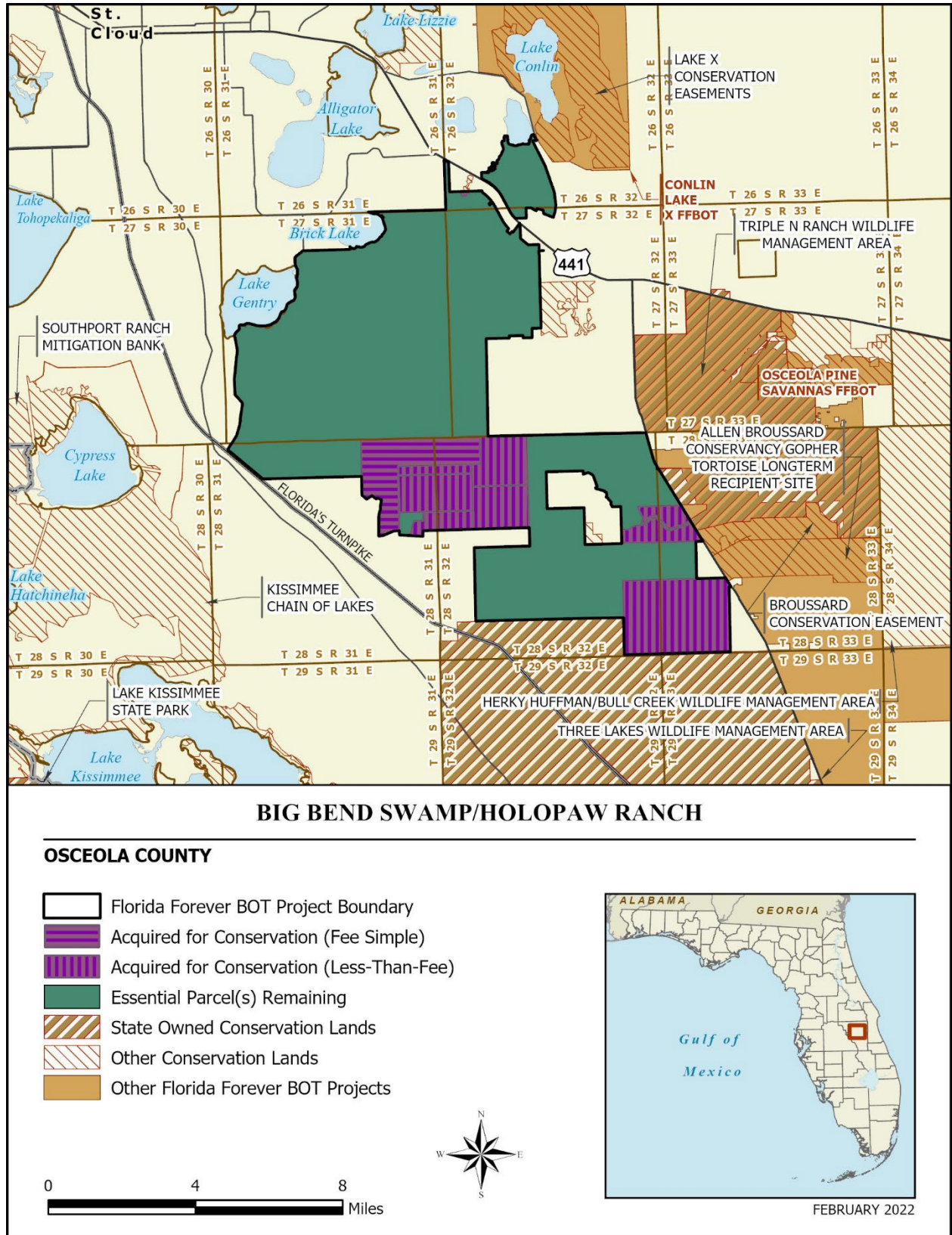
FWC will cooperate with other state and local governmental agencies in managing the area but will seek special assistance from FFS in managing forest resources and implementing prescribed burning programs.

Management Cost Summary

<u>FWC</u>	<u>2000/01</u>	<u>2001/02</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	CARL
Salaries	\$72,311	\$74,480
OPS	\$5,500	\$5,500
Expense	\$32,424	\$32,424
OCO	\$72,500	\$0
FCO	\$0	\$0
TOTAL	\$182,735	\$112,404

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





Map 1: FNAI, February 2022