

Bluefield to Cow Creek

Less-than-Fee

Okeechobee, St. Lucie

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2020
<i>Project Acres</i>	10,996
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	0
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	10,996
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$35,290,547

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Bluefield to Cow Creek project will protect a significant portion of South Florida's rural landscape, high-quality natural wetlands, wildlife habitat and the water resources of the region. The entire project is within the Cypress Creek/Trail Ridge Natural Storage and Water Quality Area, as identified in the Indian River Lagoon- South Restoration Plan, a component of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. The conservation of this expansive, undeveloped area will protect the water quality of the St. Lucie River Estuary and Indian River Lagoon.

General Description

Bluefield to Cow Creek proposal encompasses 10,942 acres of land in eastern Okeechobee County and western St. Lucie County approximately 12 miles northeast of the town of Okeechobee on SR 70. 7,628.56 acres of the project are in St. Lucie County and 3,311 acres of acres are located in Okeechobee County. All lands within the project are working cattle ranches. As such, nearly half of the acreage in the project is improved pasture. Large blocks of improved pasture occur on the eastern side and in the northern portion of the western side of the topographic break that runs generally north/south through the project. Some portion of the improved pastures were previously in row crops and now contain extensive systems of ditches and dikes.

The dominant natural feature of the project is the large system of basin swamp and hydric hammock that generally extend along the entire western boundary continuing to the north and south of the proposal. Wetlands comprise approximately 35% of the project and include large forested swamps, isolated forested swamps, and isolated marshes scattered throughout improved pasture. Two notably large swamps occur within the project: one in the northern portion associated with Cow Creek and another in the southern portion associated with Cypress Creek. The core of the Cypress Creek swamp is in the southwest portion of the project just east of Bluefield Road, extending north of SR 70. The swamp has seen little disturbance and is composed primarily of cypress with mixed hardwood with some cypress reportedly up to 5 feet in diameter.

The Bluefield to Cow Creek project provides habitat for several rare species. Crested caracara are commonly observed within the project. Large vigorous populations of air plants are present, including at least three rare species. Numerous bald eagles, wood storks, and other wading birds utilize the project

area. A known wading bird rookery is located less than 0.5 miles south of the project boundary. In addition, a robust population of fox squirrels is present throughout the project.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
<i>blunt-leaved peperomia</i>	G5/S2
Crested caracara	G5/S2

Public Use

Bluefield to Cow Creek is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access. The project will provide public benefit through water quality protection, rural landscape conservation, and as a wildlife corridor.

Acquisition Planning

In October 2020 the ARC placed this project in the Less-Than-Fee category of the 2021 Florida Forever Priority List.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Bluefield to Cow Creek project would be managed for conservation purposes by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

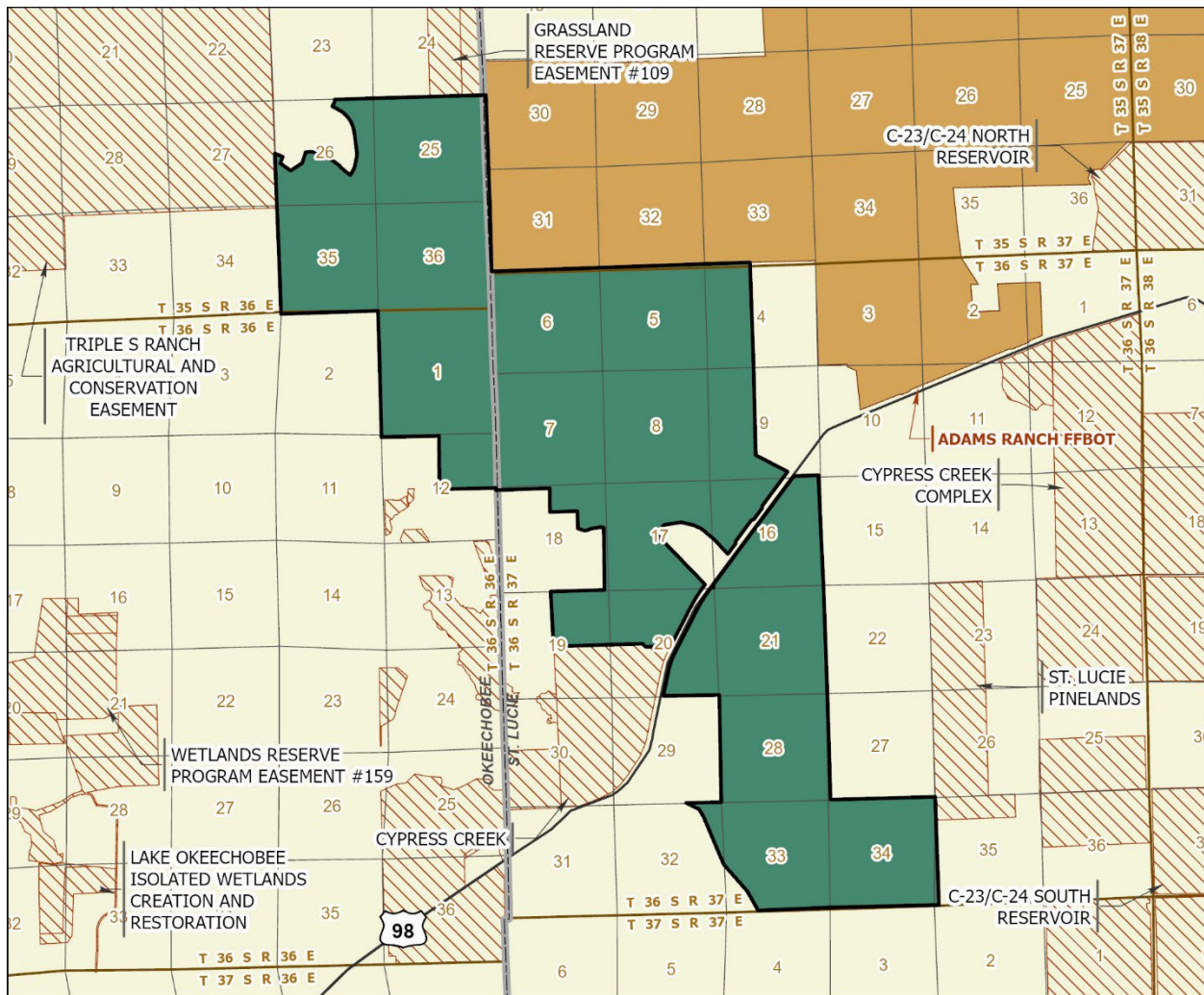
Manager(s)

If acquired as less-than-fee, management of Bluefield to Cow Creek 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.





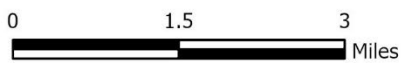
BLUEFIELD TO COW CREEK

OKEECHOBEE AND ST. LUCIE COUNTIES

-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Essential Parcel(s) Remaining
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects



FEBRUARY 2022



Map 1: FNAI, February 2022

