

# Bombing Range Ridge

Critical Natural Lands

Highlands, Osceola, Polk

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	1998
<i>Project Acres</i>	47,289
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	18,027
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$24,431,085
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	29,262
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$31,620,338

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Bombing Range Ridge project will protect flatwoods, marshes, swamps, hammocks, and scrub ridge that provide critical habitat for at least 20 rare animals including red-cockaded woodpeckers, snail kites, Florida scrub jays, and grasshopper sparrows. The project would contribute to the protection of significant water resources including the Kissimmee River, Lake Rosalie, Tiger Lake, and Lake Walk-in-Water and would connect Avon Park Air Force Range (APAFR) with adjacent state conservation lands. The project will provide areas for natural-resource based recreation and protect the ruins of Sumica, a small turpentine and timber community built and then abandoned in the early 20th-century.

## General Description

The project is located 15 miles east of Lake Wales and is adjacent to the west side of Lake Kissimmee in southeastern Polk County. The project's namesake, the Bombing Range Ridge, is a prominent relic sand bar that separates the Kissimmee River to the east and Arbuckle Creek to the west. The project includes most of the remaining unprotected portions of the ridge that are not within the APAFR. South of SR 60 consists of a mosaic of natural communities in various ecological condition. The project contained several active red-cockaded woodpecker colonies and a population of Florida scrub jays. Scrubby flatwoods and scrub occur on higher elevations with mesic flatwoods interspersed with rarer community types such as seepage slope and wet prairie spreading eastward from the ridge to public lands along the Kissimmee River. East of Tiger Lake the project contains portions of the scrub ridge, mostly open mesic flatwoods with depression marsh, three large basin marsh systems and a broad floodplain marsh associated with Lake Kissimmee. Both areas are controlled by a hunt club and numerous modular homes, parked recreational vehicles and other similar type structures scattered throughout the Bombing Range Ridge and along the larger marshes east of Tiger Lake. Areas of the project south of Lake Rosalie and northeast of Lake Weohyakapka contain sections of Weohyakapka Creek, a blackwater stream, and associated wetlands including an extensive floodplain swamp and hydric hammock. Uplands in this portion of the project support, mesic flatwoods, scrubby flatwoods and dry prairie. The large tract that sits northeast of Lake Weohyakapka has been well-managed and is relatively undisturbed. This is

the site of an old railroad grade and the remains of the Sumica settlement, a sawmill town from the early 20th century.

### FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Florida scrub-jay	G1G2/S1S2
Red-cockaded woodpecker	G3/S2
Eastern indigo snake	G3/S2?
Snail kite	G4G5/S2
Swallow-tailed kite	G5/S2
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Berry's skipper	G2/S2
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
<i>nodding pinweed</i>	G3/S3
Florida burrowing owl	G4T3/S3
Bachman's sparrow	G3/S3
Bald eagle	G5/S3

### Public Use

The area can support a range of recreation opportunities from hiking and primitive camping to canoeing, fishing, and hunting.

### Acquisition Planning

#### **1997**

The Bombing Range Ridge project was added to the LAMAC 1997 CARL Priority list at their December meeting. This fee-simple acquisition, sponsored by FNAI and FWC, consisted of approximately 39,073 acres, multiple owners, and a 1997 taxable value of \$15,238,510.

The project was divided into Priority I and Priority II areas. The essential parcels are Priority I, especially Wheeler, Avatar, Winter Haven Christian School, Lightsey, River Ranch Landowners Association members, Polk County, and the Patrick Nee ownerships.

On August 19, 1997, the Polk County Board of County Commissioners signed a resolution that gave high priority to this project and supported the acquisition through the CARL program.

#### **1998**

In 1998, Polk County and the SFWMD acquired the Sumica tract (4,167 acres).

#### **2001**

On May 17, 2001, the ARC approved a fee-simple 1,521-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by the owner, Meredith Scott MD Trust, and had a 2000 taxable value of \$3,256,856.

#### **2003**

On August 15, 2003, ARC approved a less-than-fee 1,691-acre addition (Brahma Island tract) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by Saunders Realty, consisted of one owner, Cary and Layne Lightsey, and had a 2002 taxable value of \$176,180. OES will monitor the conservation easement.



**2005**

In April 2005, the BOT acquired the Brahma Island Tract (1,063.40 acres) through a conservation easement.

**2006**

On October 13, 2006, the ARC approved a fee-simple, 3,189-acre addition (aka Goolsby Ranch) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by TNC, had one landowner, the Goolsby family, and had a 2004 taxable value of \$415,291. If acquired, the site, in Highlands County, will be managed by the FFS. In view of the configuration of the Bombing Range Ridge project, this site is not essential to project completion or manageability.

**2011**

On August 15, 2011, the DSL purchased a 2,674-acre easement in the project from TNC. OES will be responsible for monitoring compliance with the terms and conditions of the easement.

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

**2018**

On November 30, 2018, DACS closed on a 4,468-acre easement owned by the Goolsby Ranch.

**2020**

On February 14, 2020, the ARC approved a 0.94-acre reduction to the project boundary in Polk County.

On June 12, 2020, the ARC approved a 2.53-acre reduction to the project boundary in Polk County.

**2021**

On February 12, 2021, the ARC approved a reduction of 1.27 acres in Polk County from the project boundary.

**Coordination**

About two percent of the parcels within the project are either county owned or county tax certificates. The county has expressed interest in giving the land to the state and letting the state manage it, selling the parcels to the state, or exchanging the parcels with the state for other parcels outside the proposal. TNC is an intermediary on this project.

**Management Policy Statement**

The primary goals of management of the Bombing Range Ridge project are: to conserve and protect critical habitat for rare, endangered and threatened species; to conserve, protect, manage, or restore important ecosystems, landscapes, and forests in order to enhance or protect significant surface water, recreational, timber, fish or wildlife resources which local or state regulatory programs cannot adequately protect; to provide areas, including recreational trails, for natural-resource-based recreation; and to preserve significant archaeological or historical sites.

**Manager(s)**

FFS and FWC will manage all but 540 acres in the north portion of the project, adjacent to Rosalie Creek, which will be managed by DRP.



## **Management Prospectus**

### **Qualifications for state designation**

The Bombing Range Ridge project is a vast area of quality flatwoods together with marshes, swamps, hammocks and scrub. The project contains valuable habitat for numerous listed bird species.

Approximately 400 acres of the project on the shore of Tiger Lake is adjacent to the Lake Kissimmee State Park. The area contains Rosalie Creek, a drainage joining Lake Rosalie with Tiger Lake, and a portion of the creek is already a part of the park. The project's size and diversity make it desirable for a state forest. Management by FFS as a state forest depends on the state obtaining legal public access to the site and acquiring fee simple title to the core parcels.

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

The project is mostly comprised by small lots with several thousand owners. Numerous properties contain structures and accessory structures. This will complicate fire management and exotic species control on all but the largest most contiguous properties and create numerous challenges with encroachment, illegal dumping, and unauthorized trespass.

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

Upon the fee title acquisition, DRP proposes to provide public access for low intensity, non-facility related outdoor recreation activities. FFS proposes to manage the site as a unit of the Lake Wales Ridge State Forest, and management activities will be done with district and LWRSF personnel. Initial or intermediate efforts of FFS will concentrate on site security, public and fire management access, resource inventory, and removing trash. The public will have appropriate access while, simultaneously, sensitive resources will be affordably protected. Vehicle use by the public will be confined to designated roads and unnecessary access points will be closed. An inventory of the site's natural resources and threatened and endangered flora and fauna will be conducted to provide the basis for formulation of a management plan. Emphasis will be given to protection of Rosalie Creek and its surrounding ecological system. Resource management activities in the first year of each fee title acquisition will concentrate on site security, including posting boundaries and developing a resource inventory in conjunction with the development of a comprehensive management plan. Long-term management by DRP would include resource-based recreation and associated facilities compatible with the resources.

### **Revenue-generating potential**

Timber sales will be conducted as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions. These sales will primarily take place in upland pine stands and will provide a variable source of revenue dependent upon a variety of factors. Revenue generating potential of this project is expected to be moderate.

### **Cooperators in management activities**

FFS and DRP will cooperate with local governments, other state agencies, and the water management district to further resource management, recreational and educational opportunities, and the use of the lands for state park purposes.

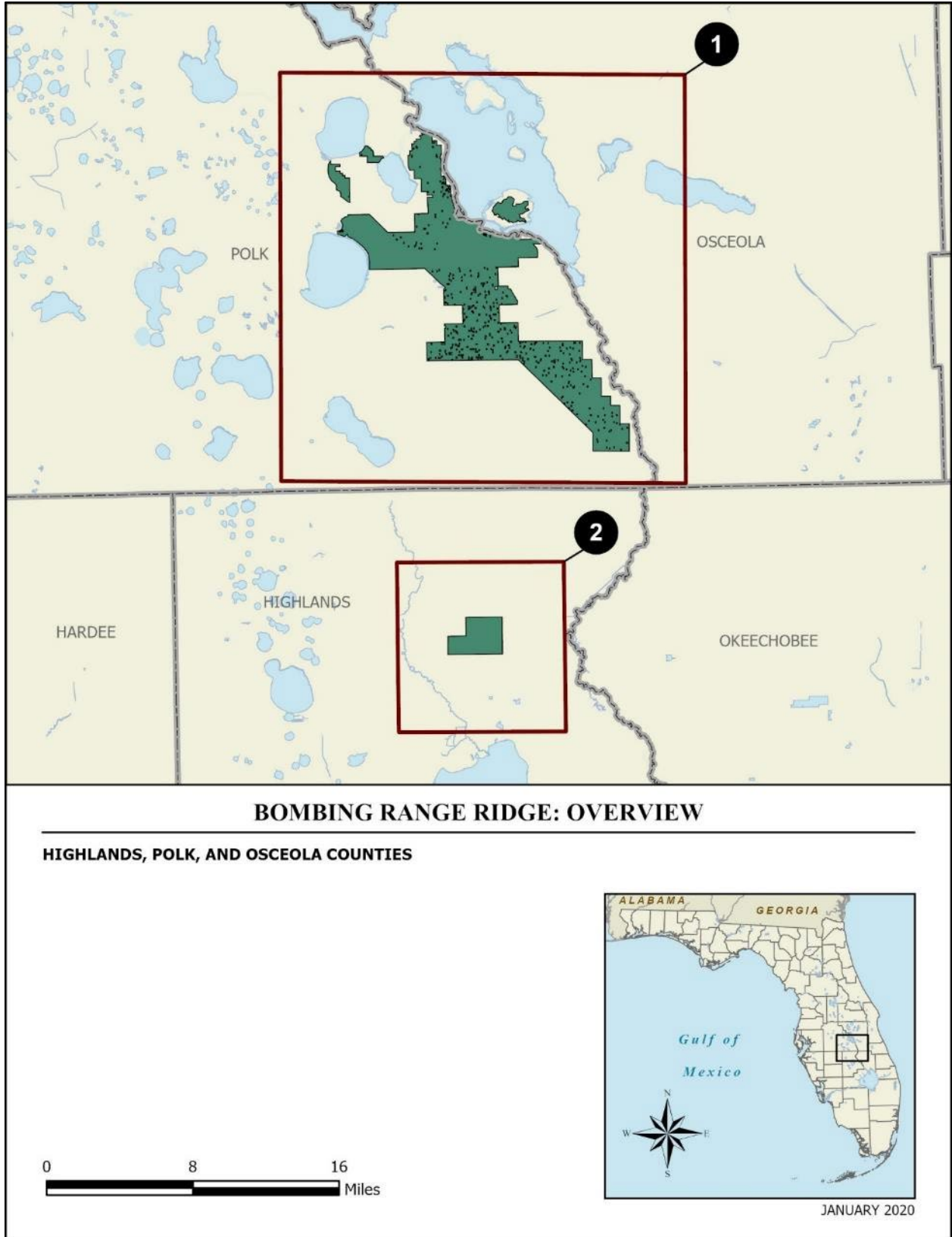


Management Cost Summary

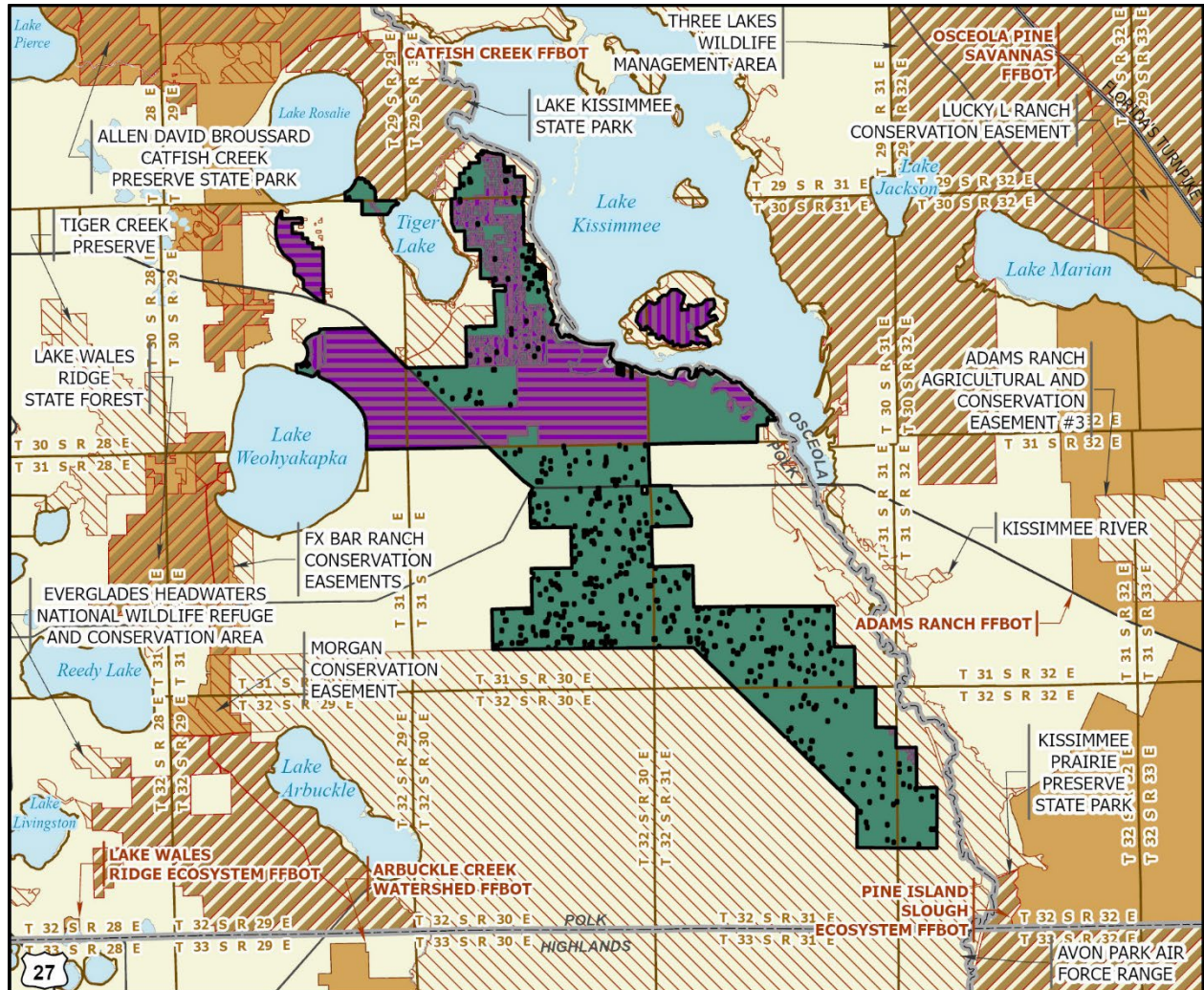
<u>FFS</u>	<u>Startup</u>
Source of Funds	LATF
Salary	\$86,412
OPS	\$0
Expense	\$70,000
OCO	\$136,400
TOTAL	\$292,812

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted in 1997





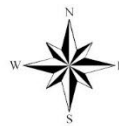
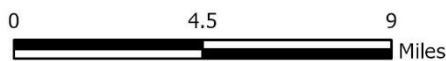
Map 1: FNAI, January 2020



**BOMBING RANGE RIDGE: MAP 1**

**POLK AND OSCEOLA COUNTIES**

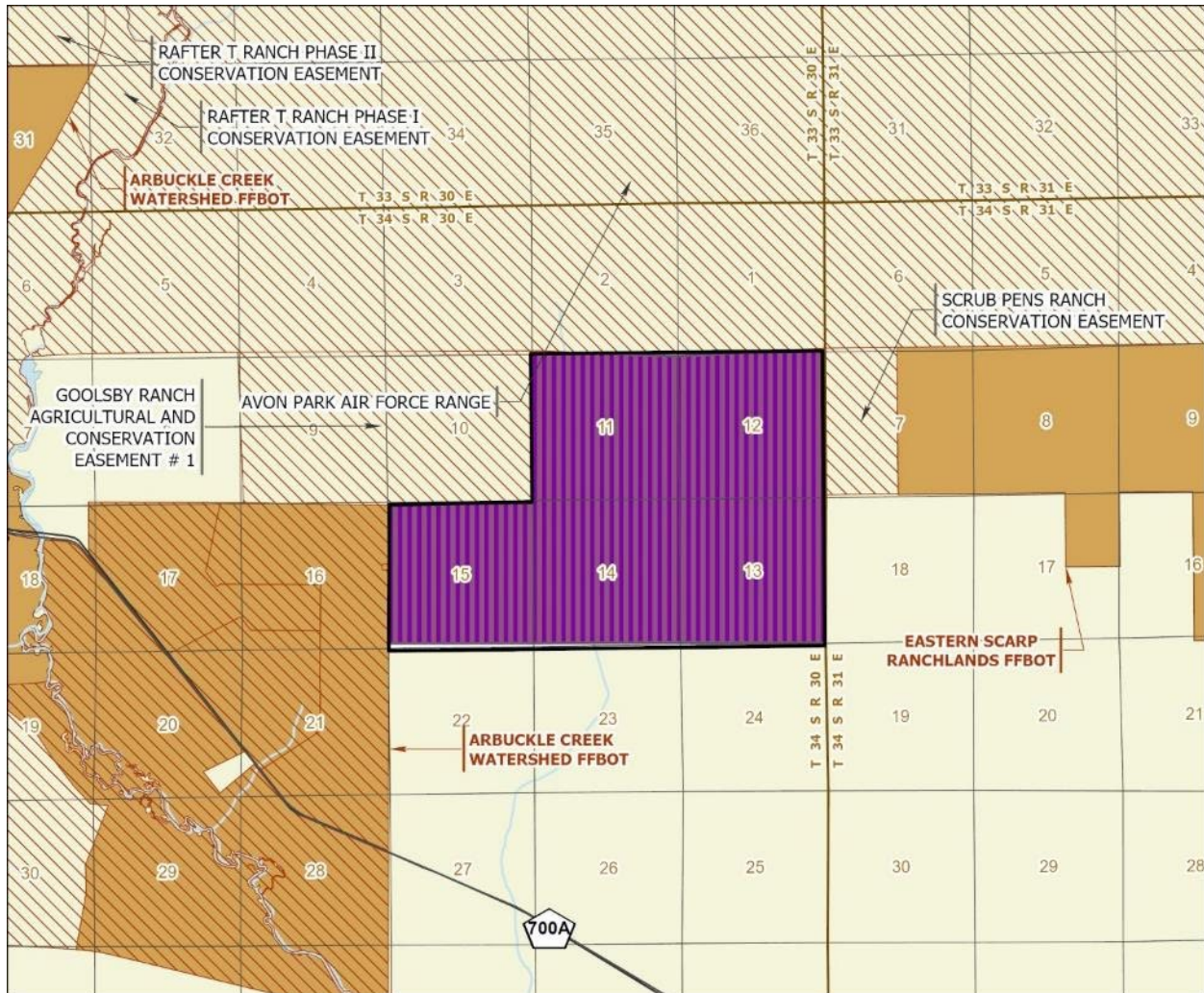
-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Acquired for Conservation (Fee Simple)
-  Acquired for Conservation (Less-Than-Fee)
-  Essential Parcel(s) Remaining
-  State Owned Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects



FEBRUARY 2022

Map 2: FNAI, February 2022





**BOMBING RANGE RIDGE: MAP 2**

**HIGHLANDS COUNTY**

-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Acquired for Conservation (Less-Than-Fee)
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects



JANUARY 2020



Map 2: FNAI, January 2020

