

# Crossbar/Al Bar Ranch

Partnerships & Regional Incentives

Pasco

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2007
<i>Project Acres</i>	12,440
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	0
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	12,440
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$60,682,678

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Crossbar/Al Bar Ranch project will preserve habitat for rare species such as the Florida black bear, eastern indigo snake, and gopher tortoise. The wetlands on the ranch are used by numerous species of wading birds including the Florida scrub-jay, sandhill crane, Southeastern American kestrel, and tricolored heron. The project will protect, restore, and maintain the quality of land and water in the site as well as increase the acreage of groundwater-recharge area. The property also has potential to be a regional park, which will be increasing natural resource-based recreation.

## General Description

The Crossbar/Al Bar Ranch (also known as the Ranch) Florida Forever project is located in north-central Pasco County. The property is owned by Pinellas County. The Crossbar portion is 8,069 acres and is the location of the 6.41 acres of the 17 active municipal wellhead sites that Tampa Bay Water owns in fee simple. The Al Bar parcel is 4,100 acres and has several wells on-site used for augmentation, but they are owned by Pinellas County, not Tampa Bay Water. Crossbar/Al Bar Ranch supports cattle, timber, a profitable pine-straw operation, an active Tampa Bay Water wellfield, an environmental education center, and three houses for staff. Most of this activity occurs on the western two-thirds, or Crossbar Ranch part, of the property. The Al Bar portion of the ranch, or eastern one-third, consists of some pine plantation and pasture but has no wellfield facilities and Pinellas County retains all water rights. About 60 percent of Crossbar/ Al Bar Ranch is in planted pine and improved pasture. (There are approximately 3,602 acres of pine plantation on Crossbar Ranch and about 1,514 acres on the Al Bar.) The natural communities present within the matrix of timber and pastureland include xeric hammock and remnant sandhill, depression marsh, mesic flatwoods, scrubby flatwoods, dome swamp, flatwoods lake, mesic hammock, baygall, and sinkhole.

### FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Florida scrub-jay	G1G2/S1S2
Eastern indigo snake	G3/S2?
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
Gopher frog	G2G3/S3
Florida burrowing owl	G4T3/S3
Pine snake	G4/S3
Southeastern American kestrel	G5T4/S3
Tricolored heron	G5/S4

#### Public Use

A resource inventory will be used to identify sensitive areas that need special attention, protection or management, and to identify areas that are appropriate for responsible recreational or administrative facilities. Recreation and administrative infrastructure development will be primarily located in disturbed areas and will be, at a minimum, required to allow suitable public access, provide facilities for public use, and to administer and manage the property. The manager will promote recreation and environmental education in the natural environment. It is anticipated that interpretive and user services recreation facilities will be developed and the use of low impact, rustic facilities will be stressed.

#### Acquisition Planning

##### **2007**

On December 14, 2007, the ARC voted to add the Crossbar/Al Bar Ranch to the A list of the Florida Forever projects. The property is proposed to be a fee-simple acquisition. SWFWMD would focus on the Crossbar portion of the acquisition, and DSL would focus on the Al Bar portion of the acquisition, both in partnership with Pasco County and others. In 2007, the project had an estimated tax assessed value of \$3,730,476.

##### **2011**

On December 9, 2011, the ARC placed this project in the Partnerships and Regional Incentives category.

#### Coordination

As stated above, SWFWMD indicated in a letter provided in the application that if the project were approved, it would consider being a project cosponsor, based on its evaluation of financial needs and partnership commitments at that time.

#### Management Policy Statement

The primary land management goals for the management of the tract are to: restore, maintain, and protect in perpetuity all native ecosystems; integrate compatible human use; and ensure long-term viability of populations and species considered rare. This ecosystem, and multiple use approach, will



guide the management activities on this project. Multiple use is defined as a combination of balanced and diverse resource uses that considers the long-term needs of future generations for renewable and nonrenewable resources. This includes, but is not limited to, recreation, range, timber, minerals, watershed, wildlife and fish, and natural scenic, scientific, and historic values; harmonious and coordinated management of the various resources without permanent impairment of the productivity of the land and the quality of the environment. Management will be designed to accomplish the goals and measures for this project.

### Manager(s)

FFS will manage the Crossbar Ranch portion of the project. At the December 2007 ARC meeting, FWC expressed interest in managing the Al Bar Ranch portion of this project (about one-third of the project area).

### Management Prospectus

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

The Crossbar/ Al Bar ranches have been managed for cattle and pine production for more than 40 years. There does not appear to be bedding within the pine plantations, but because of the conversion to pasture and straw production, most native groundcover and understory species are absent. With thinning, introduction of prescribed fire, and sustainable forestry management practices, these portions of the project could be restored to a more natural state. 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 Crossbar Ranch's flatwoods and sandhill areas were altered by silviculture and cattle operations and require restoration. Most of the acreage of this project consists of planted pine straw production area and improved pasture supporting an active cattle operation. About 60 percent of the project was converted to the pine straw and cattle operations. The pine straw production area is 4,100 acres of slash pines and the pines are 15 to 20 years old. There is an additional 500 acres of planted longleaf pine in areas to be restored before the pine straw production area is restored. The improved pastures total about 2,100 acres with multiple combinations of grasses planted in them. Biotic surveys will be important to accomplish during the early part of plan development, because many rare or listed species are expected to occur in the project. Restoration efforts will focus on introducing prescribed fire and thinning dense pine stands, exotic species treatment, restoring native groundcovers, and possible wetland restoration. The level of management intensity and related management costs is expected to initially be moderate to high to obtain the necessary information and resources to restore and manage this system as a State Forest. Once this information is obtained and resources are available, long-term management costs are expected to be moderate to maintain this area as a State Forest.

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

Once the project area is acquired and assigned to FFS, public access will be immediately provided for low-intensity outdoor resource-based recreation activities such as hiking, biking, hunting, and fishing. Initial and intermediate management efforts will concentrate on resource inventory, restoration, and reforestation of areas where harvesting has occurred, site security, and public and fire management access. Inventories of the site’s natural resources, threatened, and endangered flora and fauna will be conducted to provide a basis for the formulation of a management plan. The numerous roads throughout the property require development of a road plan to identify those roads to be used for vehicular access by the public and roads for administrative use. Roads found to be unnecessary for management or access should be closed. Long-range plans for this property will be directed toward the restoration of disturbed areas, maintenance of natural communities, and responsible public access. To the greatest extent practical, disturbed sites will be restored to conditions that would be expected to occur in naturally functioning ecosystems. Off-site species will eventually be replaced with species that would be expected to occur naturally on those specific sites. Very little of this project area has been burned by prescribed fire in recent years. Burning goals for this project will be to eventually establish an all-season prescribed burning program on all the fire dependent community types. Whenever possible, existing roads, black lines, foam lines, and natural breaks will be utilized to contain, and control prescribed and natural fires. Timber management activities will primarily consist of re-introducing longleaf pines, restoration harvests, and improvement cuts aimed at restoring and perpetuating native ground covers. Stands will be managed to maintain a broad diversity of age, from young stands to areas with old growth characteristics. This will provide habitat for the full spectrum of species that would be found in the natural environment.

**Revenue-generating potential**

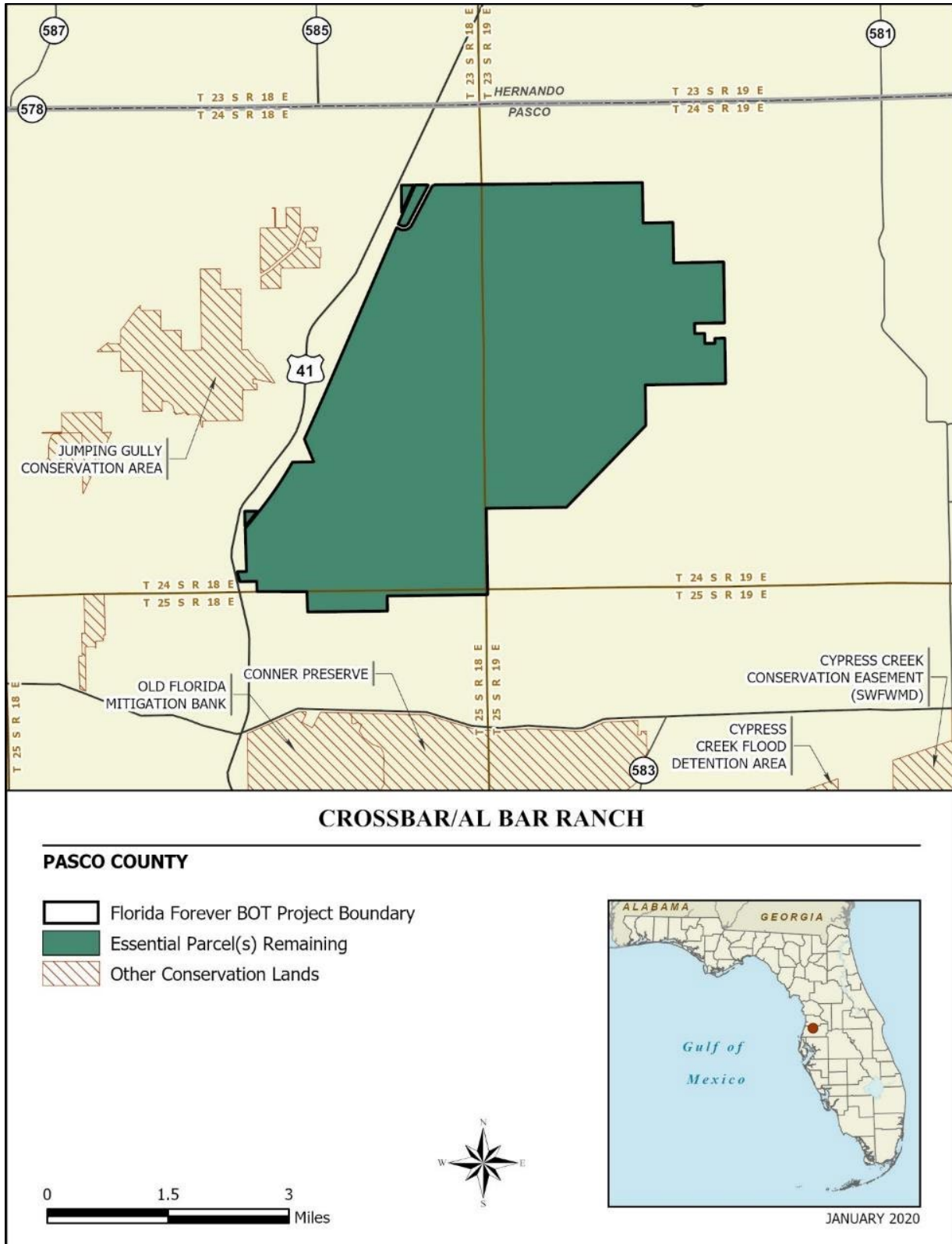
As mentioned above, timber sales from the Crossbar Ranch by the DOF will be conducted as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions. These sales will primarily take place in planted pine stands and will provide a variable source of revenue dependent upon a variety of factors. Due to the existing condition and volume of the timber resources on the property, revenue generating potential of this project is expected to be moderately high. Some revenues might be realized in the future from recreational user fees and ecotourism activities if such projects could be economically developed. It is anticipated that management funding will come from the CARL trust fund.

Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS and FWC</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Salary (3 FTE)	\$108,341	not provided
Expense	\$500,000	not provided
OCO	\$450,000	not provided
TOTAL	\$1,058,341	not provided

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





Map 1: FNAI, January 2020