

Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector

Less-Than-Fee

Indian River, Okeechobee

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2002
<i>Project Acres</i>	40,795
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	9,614
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$26,095,000
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	31,181
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$114,808,563

Purpose for State Acquisition

The purpose of the Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector is to provide ecological and hydrological connection between the Fort Drum Marsh Conservation Area to the east and the Kissimmee Prairie State Preserve and the Ordway-Whittell Kissimmee Prairie Sanctuary to the west. The project will protect strategic habitat for numerous rare species such as the grasshopper sparrow, sandhill crane, mottled duck, wood stork, crested caracara, red-cockaded woodpeckers, and other imperiled bird species. Acquisition of this project will meet the Florida Forever goals of increasing protection of Florida's biodiversity, protecting and restoring the natural functions of land, and increasing natural resource-based public recreation. This project has the potential to support the completion of the Florida National Scenic Trail, a statewide non-motorized trail that crosses several Florida Forever project sites.

General Description

The project consists of a landscape mosaic primarily comprised of improved pasture. It also contains mesic flatwoods, scrub and scrubby flatwoods, and dry/wet prairie. Apart from the hydric hammock/blackwater stream habitats, the natural communities on the project are fragmented within a mosaic of improved pasture. The bottomland forest and blackwater stream communities appear intact and are generally located on the eastern portion of the project. The dry and wet prairie communities are confined to the southwestern portion of the proposal and are impacted by several ditches. The remaining natural communities are fragmented across the proposal.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Wood stork	G4/S2
Crested caracara	G5/S2
<i>cutthroatgrass</i>	G3/S3
<i>hand fern</i>	G4/S2
<i>large-flowered rosemary</i>	G3/S3
Florida burrowing owl	G4T3/S3
Bachman's sparrow	G3/S3
Bald eagle	G5/S3
Limpkin	G5/S3
Little blue heron	G5/S4

Public Use

Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access. However, upon coordination with the landowner, recreational activity might include bird watching, environmental education, hiking, horseback riding, off-road bicycling, hunting, nature study and photography.

Acquisition Planning

2001

The Kissimmee-St. Johns Connector project was added to the 2002 Florida Forever Priority List as a Group A project at the December 6, 2001 meeting of the ARC. The project consists of 91 parcels under 11 owners. The essential parcels are identified as the Okeechobee Partnership, Oliver, Callaway, LOR, Russakis Ranch, Wedgeworth, Padgett Creek, and the Triple S Cattle Company ownerships.

2007

On December 12, 2007, and December 19, 2007, Indian River County closed on two easements on two adjacent ranches (Triple S Land Company/728 acres for \$5,096,000 and Padgett Creek LLC/857 acres for \$5,999,000). The combined purchases totaling 1,585 acres for \$11,095,000 are known as the Padgett Branch Conservation Easement.

2011

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

2016

On April 22, 2016, after voting to add the Lewis Friend Farm proposal to the Florida Forever list, the ARC voted to increase the Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector project in size by adding the Lewis Friends Farms land into the boundary of the Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector. This 1,088-acre wedge-shaped property is in western Indian River County alongside State Road 60 and the Turnpike. It has



planted longleaf pine and natural upland and wetland forest and is next to the Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector less-than-fee Florida Forever project.

2020

On October 9, 2020, the ARC approved the Abington Ranch addition of 3,656-acres in Okeechobee County to the project boundary.

2021

DEP acquired a perpetual conservation easement over 6,670.20 acres known as Osowaw Ranch from Wedgeworth Farms, Inc.

Coordination

TNC is partnering with DSL on this project.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector would be managed for conservation purposes by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

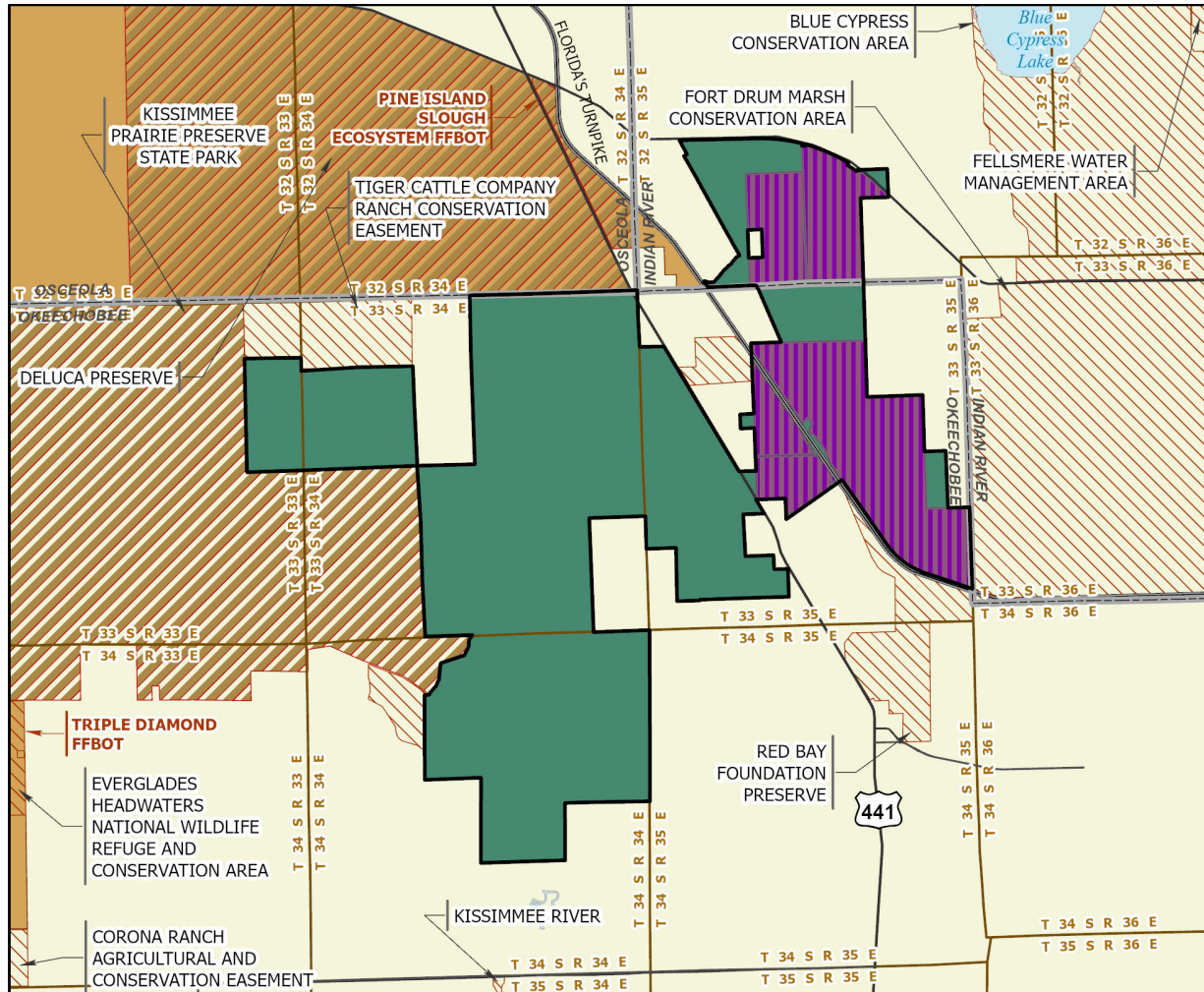
Manager(s)

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of the Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector 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.





KISSIMMEE-ST. JOHNS RIVER CONNECTOR

INDIAN RIVER AND OKEECHOBEE COUNTIES

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



MAY 2022



Map 1: FNAI, May 2022

