

Lochloosa Forest

Partnerships & Regional Incentives

Alachua

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2016
<i>Project Acres</i>	4,693
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	0
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	4,693
<i>2019 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$5,227,567

Purpose for State Acquisition

Lochloosa Forest is part of a long-term effort to establish a wildlife and forested regional habitat along the eastern lakes portion of Alachua County, linking these landscapes to the Camp Blanding and Lake Santa Fe Florida Forever projects to the northeast. It fills the area between the Austin Carey Memorial Forest managed by the University of Florida and the Balu County Park managed by Alachua County, between Gainesville and Waldo. This project will contribute to the protection of surface-water supplies, protection of groundwater recharge areas to ensure the groundwater supply of the state, restoration of natural functions of land and water by curtailing commercial forestry chemicals and restoring natural groundwater flow and increase the protection of wildlife species by increasing the acreage of their habitat. One hundred percent of the proposal is within the Surface Water Protection layer of the Florida Forever Measures Evaluation. Protecting these wetlands from further cutting and disturbance will improve the quality of water entering adjoining conservation lands on the south and to Newnans Lake.

General Description

Lochloosa Forest is an area of upland terraces, where flatwoods, swamps and marshes predominate. The land is from 95 to 150 feet above sea level and has two creeks flowing through it - Hatchet Creek from northwest to southeast, and Bee Tree Creek running north to south through the eastern part of the property.

Historically, most of the plantation areas supported a mosaic of mesic and wet flatwoods and a few small pockets of sandhill. Wetlands associated with the creek system and scattered dome swamps throughout the plantation make up approximately 19 percent of the site. Bee Tree Creek has several large floodplain swamp wetlands in the eastern part of Lochloosa Forest, the largest being just north of where Bee Tree Creek enters Balu Forest. A big swath of the western side of this swamp and smaller areas north and south, totaling nearly 100 acres, have been logged in the past for cypress and, to a lesser extent, hardwoods.

Structure and species composition vary considerably between timber stands and generally reflects the amount of heavy shading or severe soil and vegetation disturbances associated with forestry operations. Very little natural groundcover remains in the pine plantations although many are dominated by native shrubs indicative of the natural communities the pines were planted on. This is especially true of the older stands; younger stands have a very sparse shrub layer as well as a needle-dominated groundcover. One area, located on former sandhill, has retained some native groundcover and would greatly benefit from the reintroduction of fire.

Forested wetlands make up most of the existing natural communities on the property. Bottomland forest is the predominant natural community that borders Hatchet Creek and its tributaries and the narrower parts of Bee Tree Creek. Floodplain swamp is present in the larger wetlands associated with Bee Tree Creek, where the canopy is dominated by cypress (*Taxodium* sp.).

Numerous dome swamps are scattered throughout the pine plantations. Cypress and hardwoods have been heavily harvested from many of the dome and floodplain swamp natural communities and scattered large stumps can be seen in the bottomland forest, indicative of past logging. Hydrology has been disrupted in some wetlands by ditches that drain formerly isolated dome swamps into the larger creeks.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4

Public Use

Because more than 80 percent of this area has been managed over the years as a pine plantation, the fire dependent character of the Lochloosa Forest and the potential for ongoing silviculture may preclude development of recreation access or interpretive facilities. The altered landcover sites may be best suited for restoration, operational support or small-scale education facilities. The ridgeline ecotone and creek system are scenic features of the proposal and offer significant conservation value. Hatchet Creek yields a scenic bottomland forest and basin swamp, which would be well-protected under forest-wide management as an educational “outdoor classroom/laboratory” comparable to the University of Florida’s adjacent Austin Cary Forest. The Austin Cary Forest currently performs the conservation and education functions, which could be fittingly extended to the Lochloosa Forest.

Significant recreational opportunities that may be offered by the acquisition would include hiking, nature interpretation, and primitive camping. Integration of teaching opportunities may be feasible with trail development and sustainable recreation management.

Also, managers at UF’s Austin Cary Memorial Forest noted that hunting may be an appropriate compatible multiple use on the tract. The university forest manager’s suggestion was to use the activity



as part of an educational opportunity for wildlife management studies, and the Florida Forest Service noted that it could also be a site for Operation Outdoor Freedom (OOF) hunts.

Acquisition Planning

2016

Lochloosa Forest was submitted as a much larger project comprising parcels across eastern Alachua County, but was redesigned to its current acreage once the perpetual conservation easements already acquired, and the Weyerhaeuser property, were eliminated from the boundary. It was approved as a 4,693-acre project adjoining the Austin Carey Memorial Forest. It was introduced to the Acquisition and Restoration Council for evaluation at the June 17, 2016 meeting, and advanced to the next phase of review. On October 21st, the ARC voted to add this proposal to the list of Florida Forever projects. It had a 2016 tax assessed value of \$894,300.

Coordination

Partners in funding and in acquiring the Lochloosa Forest are likely to include Alachua County, the Alachua Conservation Trust, and the University of Florida's Austin Carey Memorial Forest.

Management Policy Statement

The goals of managing the Lochloosa Forest are to establish a connectivity of managed lands among conservation lands in North Florida that include the Balu Forest, the Ocala National Forest and Camp Blanding. Lochloosa Forest represents a missing piece needed to create a conservation land corridor in northeast Florida. State acquisition of this site would also allow regional watershed protection and continuation of wildlife corridors, revenue from timber harvests, and recreation.

Manager(s)

The University of Florida's Austin Carey Memorial Forest will manage the site as part of their forest, with emphasis on wildlands education and training. FFS has offered to participate in the management of this forest, if necessary, possibly managing it as part of the Newnan's Lake State Forest. The property is under a timber lease until 2023.

Management Prospectus

Qualifications for state designation

Lochloosa Forest would support the education, research and public outreach role of the University of Florida. This includes developing diverse conditions for students and land-management professionals learning land-management techniques, researchers studying impacts of different land-management techniques on hydrology, wildlife, recreation, ecotourism and financial outcomes of management; and for the public to learn about scientific and systematic resource management.

Conditions affecting intensity of management

Management of the property will be limited through the year 2023 by the existing timber and hunting leases in force with the owner of the property. Management intensity can be expected to increase



gradually toward the termination of the leases. In keeping with sustainable forestry practices, the pines will be replanted before the lessee cedes the site.

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

The first step of this project, starting in 2018, would be to develop a management plan among acquisition partners Alachua County and the University of Florida that would meet teaching, research and outreach goals, and guide coordination with the current owner of the land to the termination of the timber leases. The second step would be adjusting reforestation under access limited by the timber leases, from 2018 to 2023. The third step would be to fully implement a land-management plan with specific activities to support teaching, research and public access. Because the project is adjacent to Austin Cary Memorial Forest, it is anticipated to be secured.

Revenue-generating potential

The prospective managers estimate that when the existing leases expire in 2023, about 30 percent of the property will have been clear-cut and will need reforestation. Another 30 percent will have timber from 10 to 14 years old, which could provide revenue over the subsequent five years. The remaining 40 percent of the property will have trees less than three years old, and not yet of harvestable size.

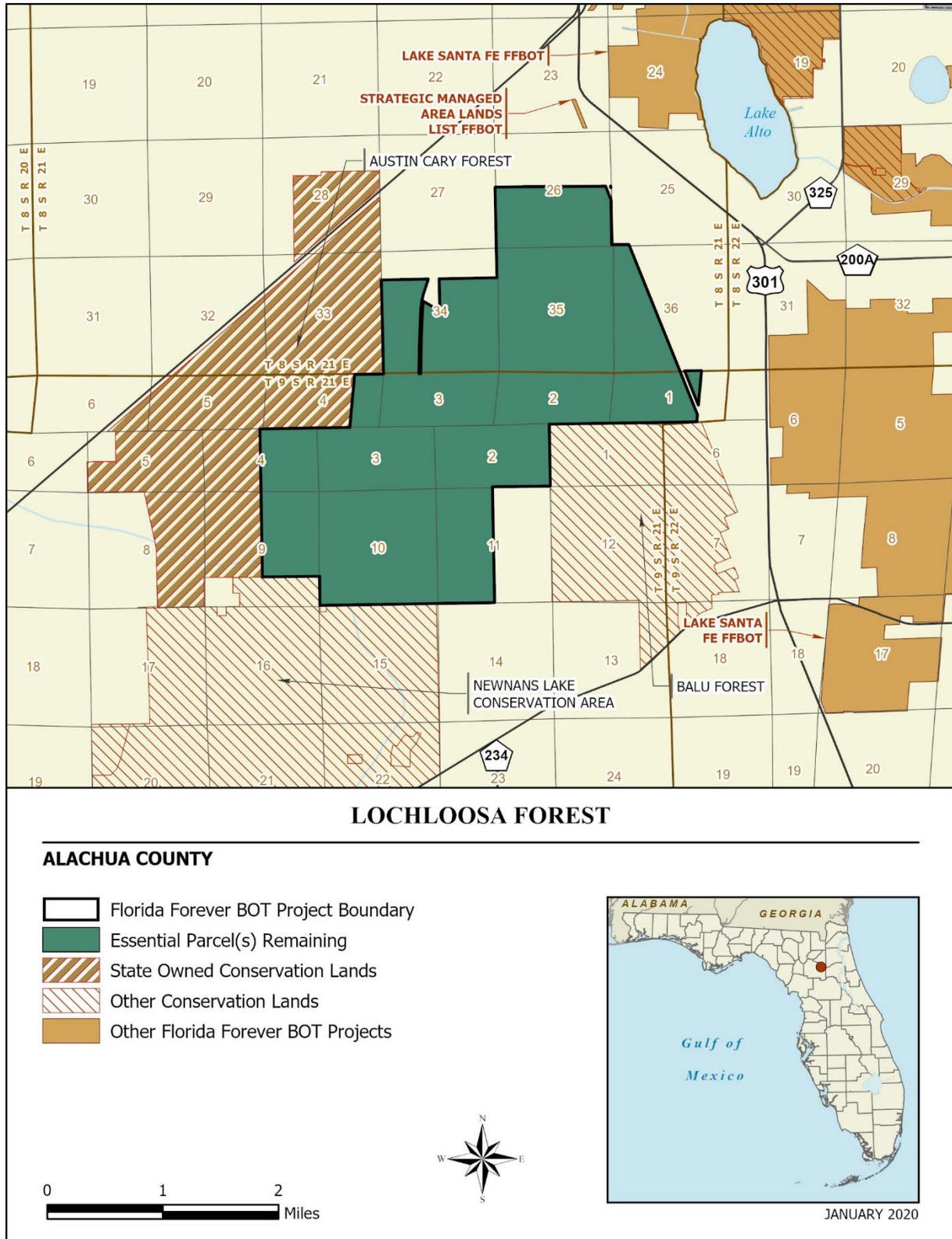
Otherwise, the addition of the Lochloosa Forest to the Austin Cary Forest is expected to require one additional technical staff member at an estimated \$40,000 yearly and three to five student employees at \$15,000 to \$26,000 yearly. The staff would also need about \$10,000 yearly in fuel, equipment and operations expenses. The University of Florida would be responsible for these costs, which would be periodically offset with such revenue as timber sales, hunting leases, pine straw harvesting and other sales.

Management Cost Summary

<u>UF/IFAS</u>	<u>Annual</u>
Source of Funds	UF/IFAS
Salary	\$40,000
Student employees/OPS	\$15,000 - \$26,000

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





Map 1: FNAI, January 2020