

# Longleaf Pine Ecosystem

Critical Natural Lands

Gilchrist, Hamilton, Marion, Volusia

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	<i>1993</i>
<i>Project Acres</i>	<i>23,946</i>
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	<i>14,031</i>
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	<i>\$30,408,180</i>
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	<i>9,915</i>
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	<i>\$60,053,274</i>

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Longleaf Pine Ecosystem project will conserve two of the largest and highest quality fragments of old-growth longleaf pine sandhills. Though they once covered much of north and central Florida, these pine sandhills are now only distant memories, replaced by pine plantations, pastures, and housing developments. The project will ensure the survival of several rare plants and animals, such as the red-cockaded woodpecker, and provide the public an opportunity to experience and enjoy the original, and increasingly rare, natural landscape of Florida's uplands. This project may also help complete the Florida National Scenic Trail, a statewide nonmotorized trail that crosses several Florida Forever project sites.

## General Description

The Longleaf Pine Ecosystem project sites (Ross Prairie Sandhill, Ross Prairie Addition, Bell Ridge, Blue Spring Longleaf, and Deland Ridge) are some of the highest quality longleaf pine sandhills in Florida. Longleaf pine sandhills are one of Florida's most distinctive and endangered forest types and have declined by more than 80 percent in the last century. The project will protect nearly 20 plants, animals, and natural communities listed by Florida Natural Areas Inventory. Archaeological sites are known to occur in the Ross Prairie tract. These sites are vulnerable to logging and fire suppression as well as development.

### FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Florida scrub-jay	G1G2/S1S2
Red-cockaded woodpecker	G3/S2
Eastern indigo snake	G3/S2?
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida mouse	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Orange Lake cave crayfish	G1/S1
Equal-clawed gopher tortoise hister beetle	G2/S1S2
<i>longspurred mint</i>	G2/S2
<i>sand butterfly pea</i>	G2Q/S2
<i>giant orchid</i>	G2G3/S2
Southern hognose snake	G2/S2S3

#### Public Use

The project will be state forest, with opportunities for hunting, hiking, horseback riding, camping and nature appreciation.

#### Acquisition Planning

The largest property owners south of canal lands (essential) within the Ross Prairie (8,216 acres) site are Janet Land Corp. (acquired) and Deltona-Marion Oaks Sub. (unwilling seller). North of the canal lands are seven (essential), Ocala Waterway Estates (essential), Guy (essential), Davis, and less than 35 other smaller tracts. The Blue Spring (1,978 acres) site consists of one owner (acquired, through TNC).

#### **1998**

On December 3, 1998, LAMAC transferred the Deland Ridge and Chassahowitzka Sandhill sites to the Negotiation Impasse group. On July 29, 1999, the Council added the 3,040-acre Ross Prairie Addition project to the Longleaf Pine Ecosystem project (Priority Group).

On December 9, 1999 the LAMAC approved the Bell Ridge project to be added to the Longleaf Pine Ecosystem project.

#### **2010**

On August 13, 2010, the ARC approved a 3,612-acre (\$528,396,412 just value) reduction to the project boundary due to residential/commercial/infrastructure disturbances.

#### **2011**

On December 9, 2011, the ARC designated this project as a Critical Natural Lands project. On July 3, 2012 the BOT acquired 5.16 acres in the Ross Prairie area for \$8,000.

#### **2013**

On April 19, 2013, the ARC approved changing the boundary of the Longleaf Pine Ecosystem Florida Forever project in Madison County, adding the 986- acre Ellaville Sandhill Tract that was approved in the February ARC meeting to the project boundary, bringing the total project acreage to 22,299.



**2021**

On April 9, 2021, ARC members approved the Big Pine Preserve proposal and voted to add the 541 acres in Marion County to the project boundary.

**Coordination**

TNC, DOT, the TPL, and the Florida Audubon Society are acquisition partners on this project.

**Management Policy Statement**

The primary goals of management of the Longleaf Pine Ecosystem project are to: conserve and protect environmentally unique and irreplaceable lands that contain native, relatively unaltered flora and fauna representing a natural area unique to, or scarce within, a region of this state or a larger geographic area; conserve and protect significant habitat for native species or endangered and threatened species; conserve, protect, manage, or restore important ecosystems, landscapes, and forests; and enhance or protect significant surface water, coastal, recreational, timber, fish or wildlife resources which local or state regulator programs cannot adequately protect.

The primary objective of management of the Bell Ridge Sandhills is to protect and restore the threatened sandhill natural community. A secondary objective is to provide resource-based recreation compatible with protection of the natural and cultural resource values of the project. The site will be managed under the multiple-use concept—management activities will be directed first toward conservation of resources and second toward integrating carefully controlled consumptive uses.

Managers will control access to the proposal; thoroughly inventory the resources; restore hydrological disturbances; conduct prescribed burning of fire-dependent communities to mimic natural lightning-season fires, using existing fire lines, natural firebreaks, existing roads, or foam lines for control; strictly limit timber harvesting in mature stands; and monitor management activities to ensure that they are conserving resources. Managers will limit the number and size of recreation facilities, ensure that they avoid the most sensitive resources, and site them in already disturbed areas when possible. The project includes over 3,000 acres of relatively undisturbed land adjacent to an existing area of conservation lands. It consequently appears to have the size and location to achieve its primary and secondary objective.

The FFS proposes to manage the project under a multiple use management regime consistent with the State Forest system, and in a manner designed to accomplish the acquisition goals and measures for this project as approved by the Acquisition and Restoration Council. These goals and measures are hereby incorporated by reference. The primary land management goal for the FFS is to restore, maintain and protect in perpetuity all native ecosystems; to integrate compatible human use; and to ensure long-term viability of populations and species considered rare. This ecosystem approach will guide the FFS management activities on this project.



## Manager(s)

FFS will manage the Blue Spring Longleaf site, Bell Ridge site, and Ross Prairie sites, except the ones that are part of the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway portion and are under an approved management lease to DRP. FFS will manage Bell Ridge under a multiple-use management regime.

## Management Prospectus

### **Qualifications for state designation**

The quality of the pine forests on the Blue Spring Longleaf and Ross Prairie sites, and their size and diversity, make them suitable for state forests. Bell Ridge: The major community represented on this project is sandhill. The project's size and diversity make it desirable for use and management as a State Forest. Management by the FFS as a State Forest is contingent upon the state acquiring fee simple title to the entire project and obtaining some level of legal public access to the site, which is likely since the eastern and northern property boundaries are county maintained graded roads.

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

#### **Blue Spring tract**

There are no known major disturbances that will require extraordinary attention, so management intensity is expected to be typical for a state forest. On Ross Prairie, however, the construction of an extension of the Florida Turnpike may hinder fire management activities and public access to the forest.

#### **Bell Ridge**

There are portions of the parcel that have been disturbed that will require restoration efforts. There is at least one linear facility that bisects the parcel, which will be an area of management concern for monitoring unauthorized uses and introduction of invasive exotic species. The sandhill community is considered imperiled and as such may be sensitive to certain uses and the intensity of use. As such, water resource development projects, water supply development projects, stormwater management projects and any additional linear facilities, other than those that already exist on the project, are considered incompatible with this type of ecosystem and with the resource values on this project.

#### **Residential Developments**

The adjacent residential developments will pose a management concern associated with prescribed burning, public use, unauthorized uses, and other natural resource management activities. There are areas that have refuse and debris and which should be removed prior to closing on the core parcel. Other than those above-mentioned points, there are no other known major disturbances that will require extraordinary attention. The level of management intensity and related management cost is expected to be moderately high initially to establish this as a state forest. Capital project expenditures will be needed on this parcel as listed below. They include relocation of the Trenton Work Center to this site to provide site management, security and public service. The existing Trenton Work Center is currently leased from the private sector and this lease was scheduled to expire in 2005, with no anticipation that the lease would be renewed. The existing house and barn on the property can be used for these facilities so that the expense associated with it can be reduced, although, they will require



renovation. Reinforcing the fencing in the areas of residential development will be necessary to clearly establish the boundary with resources that cannot be easily burned or altered. It is anticipated that some of the existing roads will be used as multi-use trails for hiking, horseback riding and off-road biking. As such, visitor services in the disturbed area will be provided.

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

The Blue Spring Longleaf tract and part of the Ross Prairie Sandhills tract have been acquired (the OGT manages the MHC Cross Florida Greenway portion). The FFS is now providing public access to these tracts for low-intensity, non-facilities-related outdoor recreation.

Management on the Blue Spring Longleaf tract will concentrate on maintaining the existing open conditions and seeds will be collected with as little disturbance as possible to the resources.

On all three tracts, the FFS will provide public access while protecting sensitive resources. The sites' natural resources and threatened and endangered plants and animals will be inventoried to provide the basis for a management plan. Long-range plans will address restoring disturbed areas to their original conditions, as far as possible, as well as protecting threatened and endangered species. An all-season burning program will use, whenever possible, existing roads, black lines, foam lines and natural breaks to contain fires. Timber management will mostly involve improvement thinning and regeneration harvests. Plantations will be thinned and, where appropriate, reforested with species found in natural ecosystems. Stands will not have a targeted rotation age. Infrastructure will primarily be in disturbed areas and will be the minimum required for management and public access. The FFS will promote environmental education.

Bell Ridge: Once the core area is acquired and assigned to the DOF, public access will be provided for low intensity outdoor recreation activities. The FFS proposes to manage the site as a new unit of the State Forest system, and the Waccasassa Forestry Center personnel will carry out initial management activities and coordinate public access and use. The FFS will cooperate with and seek the assistance of other state agencies, local government entities and interested parties as appropriate. Initial and intermediate management efforts will concentrate on site security, public and fire management access, resource inventory, reforestation of areas where off-site species have been harvested, natural regeneration of the native species in the areas with low densities, and any restoration activities. Steps will be taken to ensure that the public is provided appropriate access while simultaneously affording protection of sensitive resources. There are many roads throughout the property, and as such a road plan will need to be developed to determine those to be used for vehicular use by the public, those that are required for administrative use, and unnecessary access points and roads that should be closed. An inventory of the site's natural resources and threatened and endangered flora and fauna will eventually be conducted to provide a basis for formulation of a management plan. Prior to collection of necessary resource information, management proposals for this project can only be conceptual in nature. Long-range plans for this property will generally be directed toward the restoration of disturbed areas and maintenance of natural communities. To the greatest extent practical, disturbed sites will be restored to



conditions that would be expected to occur in naturally functioning ecosystems. Any existing pine plantations will be thinned to achieve a more natural appearance. Offsite species will eventually be replaced with species that would be expected to occur naturally on those specific sites.

Management activities will also stress enhancement of the abundance and spatial distribution of threatened and endangered species. Portions of the area can sustain an all season prescribed burning program utilizing practices which incorporate recent research findings. The objective is 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 improvement of thinning and regeneration harvests aimed at maintaining and perpetuating forest ecosystems. Stands will not have a targeted rotation age but will be managed to maintain a broad diversity of age classes ranging 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 and enhance and maintain biodiversity. The resource inventory will be used to identify sensitive areas that need special attention, protection or management, and to locate areas that are appropriate for any recreational or administrative facilities. Recreation and administrative infrastructure development will primarily in already-disturbed areas and will be the absolute minimum required to allow public access for the uses mentioned above, to provide facilities to accommodate public use, and to administer and manage the property. The FFS will promote recreation and environmental education in the natural environment. It is anticipated that interpretative and user services recreational facilities will be developed and the use of low impact, rustic facilities will be stressed. High impact, organized recreation areas are not planned because of possible adverse effects on the natural environment. Unnecessary roads, fire lines and hydrological disturbances will be abandoned and/or restored to the greatest extent practical.

### **Revenue-generating potential**

The FFS will sell timber as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions. These sales will provide a variable source of revenue, but the revenue-generating potential for these tracts is expected to be low. Bell Ridge: As mentioned above, 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. Due to the existing condition of the timber resource on the property, revenue generating potential of this project is expected to be medium. It is anticipated that management funding will come from the CARL trust fund or its successor.

### **Cooperators in management activities**

The FFS will cooperate with and seek the assistance of other state agencies, local government entities and interested agencies.



Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS (Bell Ridge)</u>	<u>1995/96</u>	<u>1996/97</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	CARL
Salary	\$31,080	\$41,013
OPS	\$0	\$0
Expense	\$25,505	\$11,302
OCO	\$40,626	\$0
FCO	\$0	\$0
TOTAL	\$97,211	\$52,315

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted

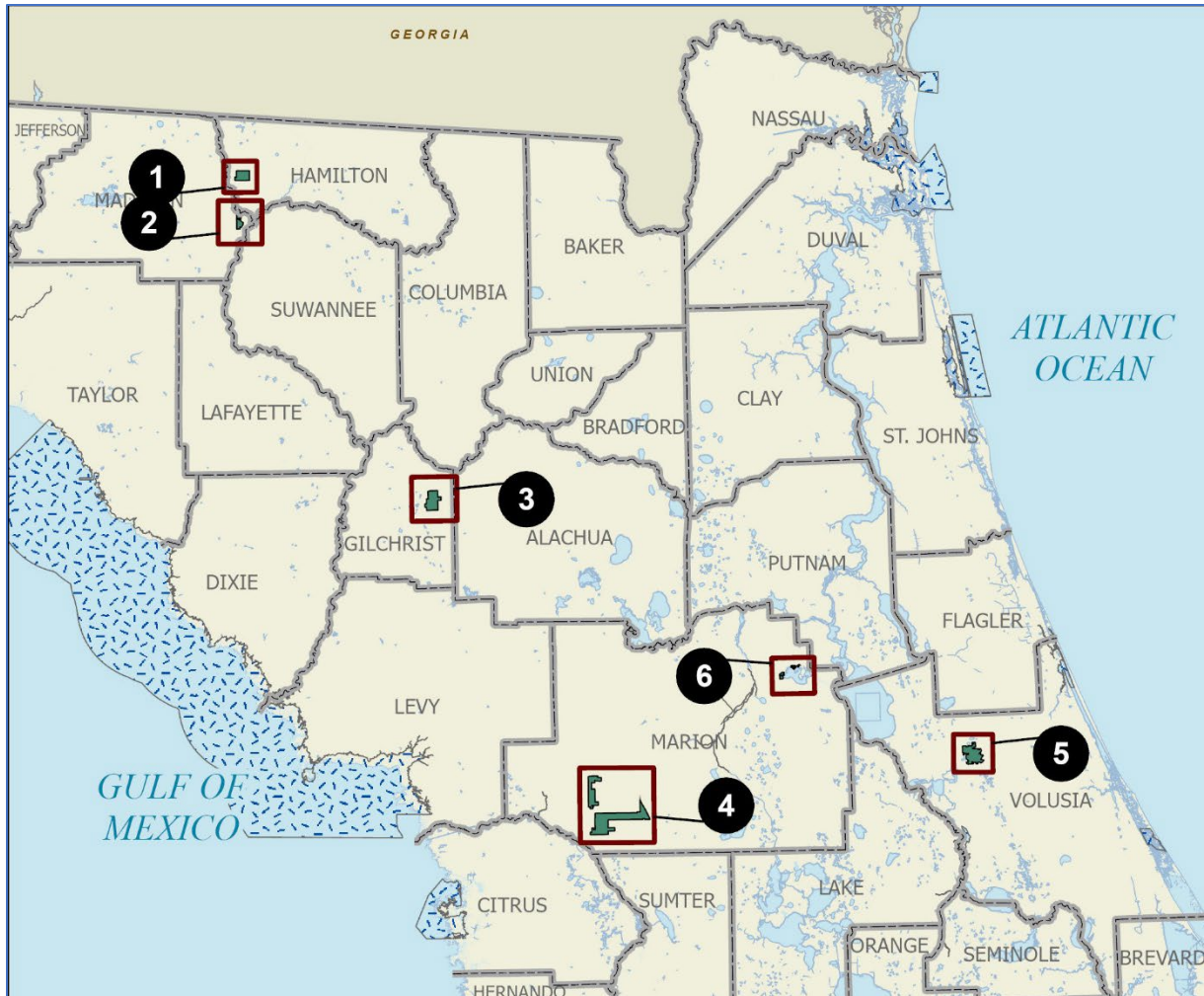
Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS (Deland Ridge)</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	CARL
Salary	\$0	\$0
OPS	\$0	\$0
Expense	\$7,000	\$5,000
OCO	\$0	\$0
FCO	\$0	\$0
TOTAL	\$7,000	\$5,000

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted



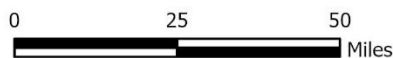




**LONGLEAF PINE ECOSYSTEM: OVERVIEW**

**GILCHRIST, HAMILTON, MADISON, MARION AND VOLUSIA COUNTIES**

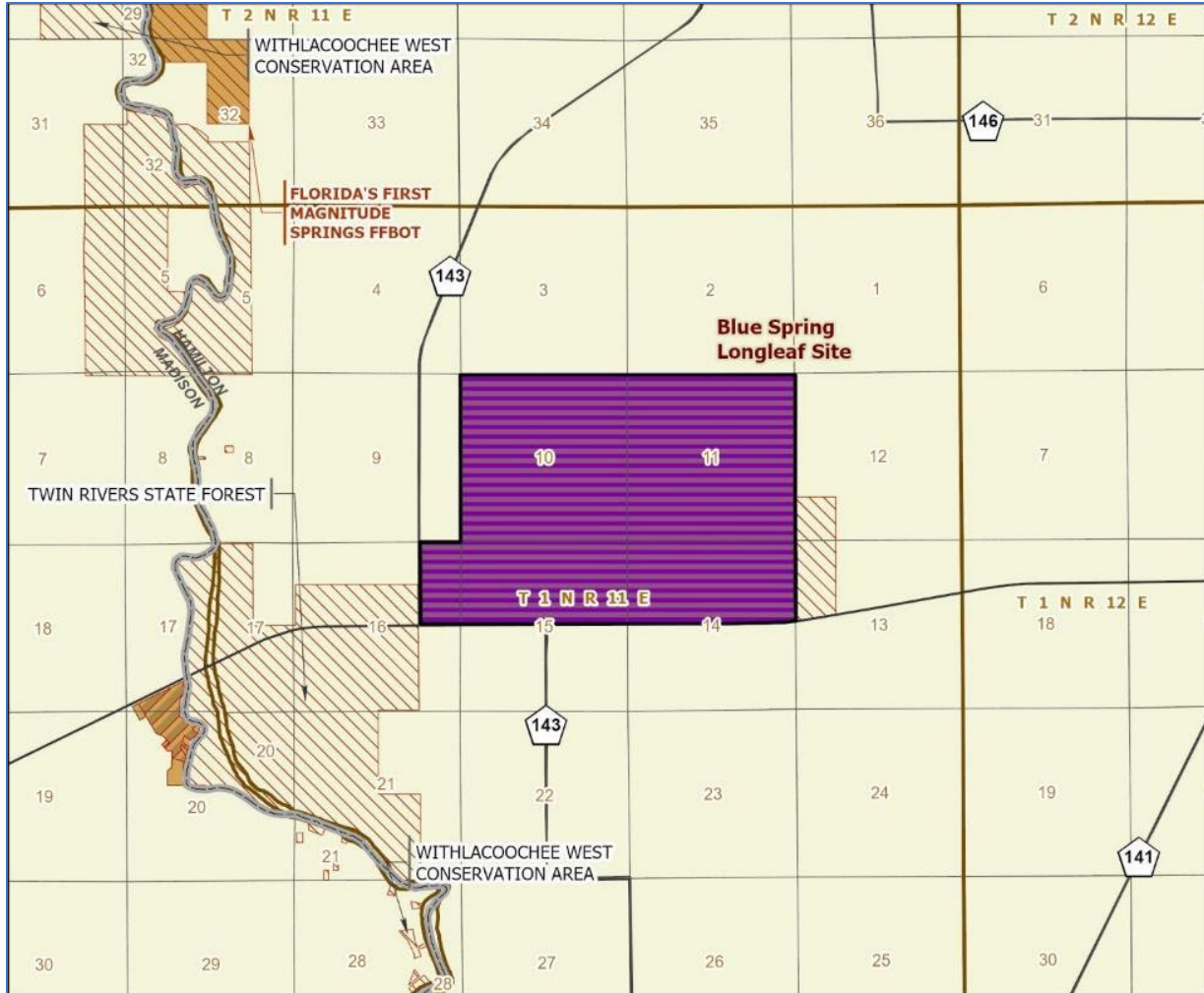
- Map 1 Blue Spring Longleaf Site
- Map 2 Ellaville Sandhill Site
- Map 3 Bell Ridge Sandhills Site
- Map 4 Ross Prairie Addition Site
- Map 4 Ross Prairie Sandhill Site
- Map 5 DeLand Ridge Sandhill Site
- Map 6 Big Pine Preserve Site



FEBRUARY 2022

Map 1: FNAI, February 2022





**LONGLEAF PINE ECOSYSTEM: MAP 1**

**HAMILTON COUNTY**

-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Acquired for Conservation (Fee Simple)
-  State Owned Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects

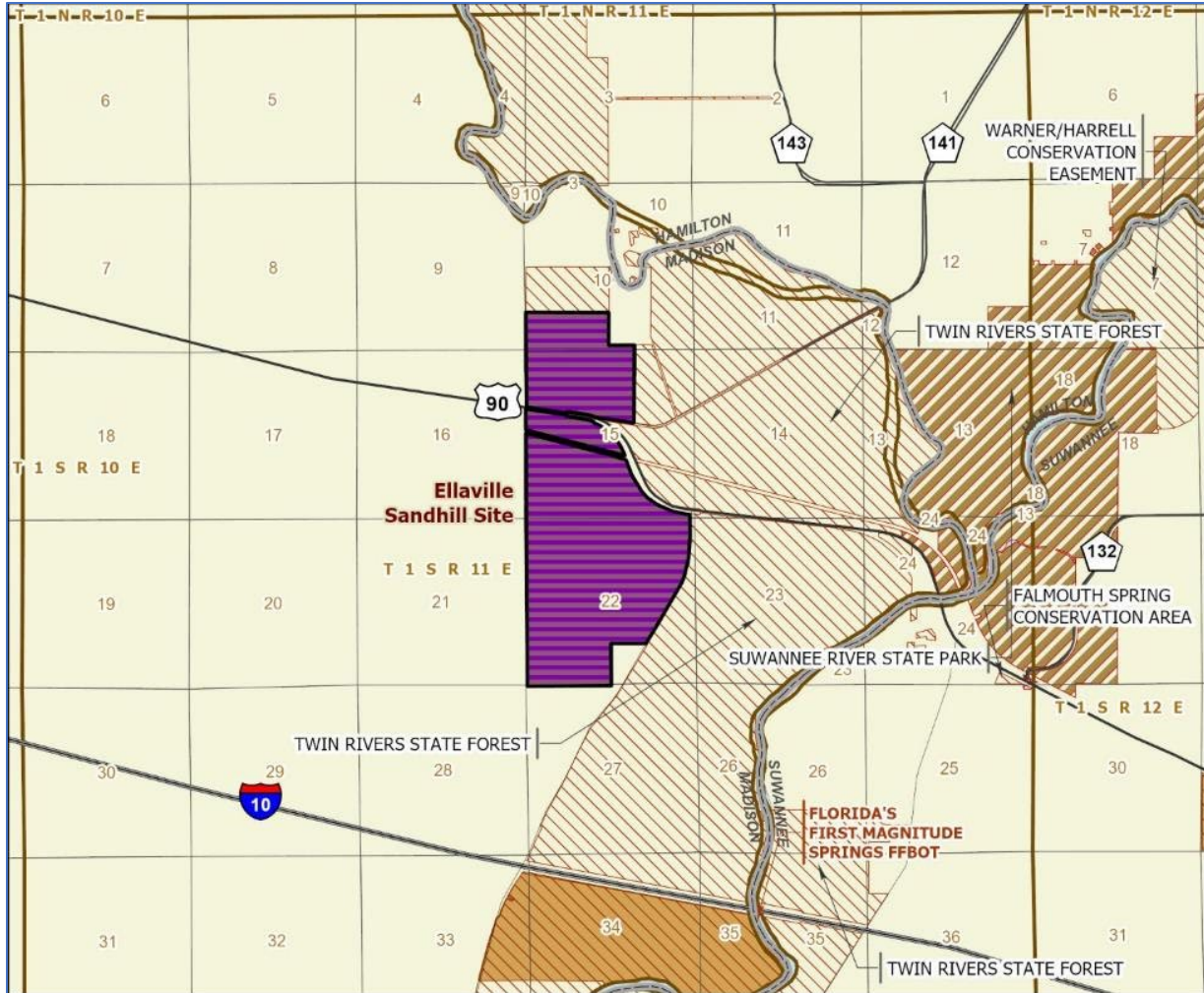


JANUARY 2020



Map 2: FNAI, January 2020





**LONGLEAF PINE ECOSYSTEM: MAP 2**

**MADISON COUNTY**

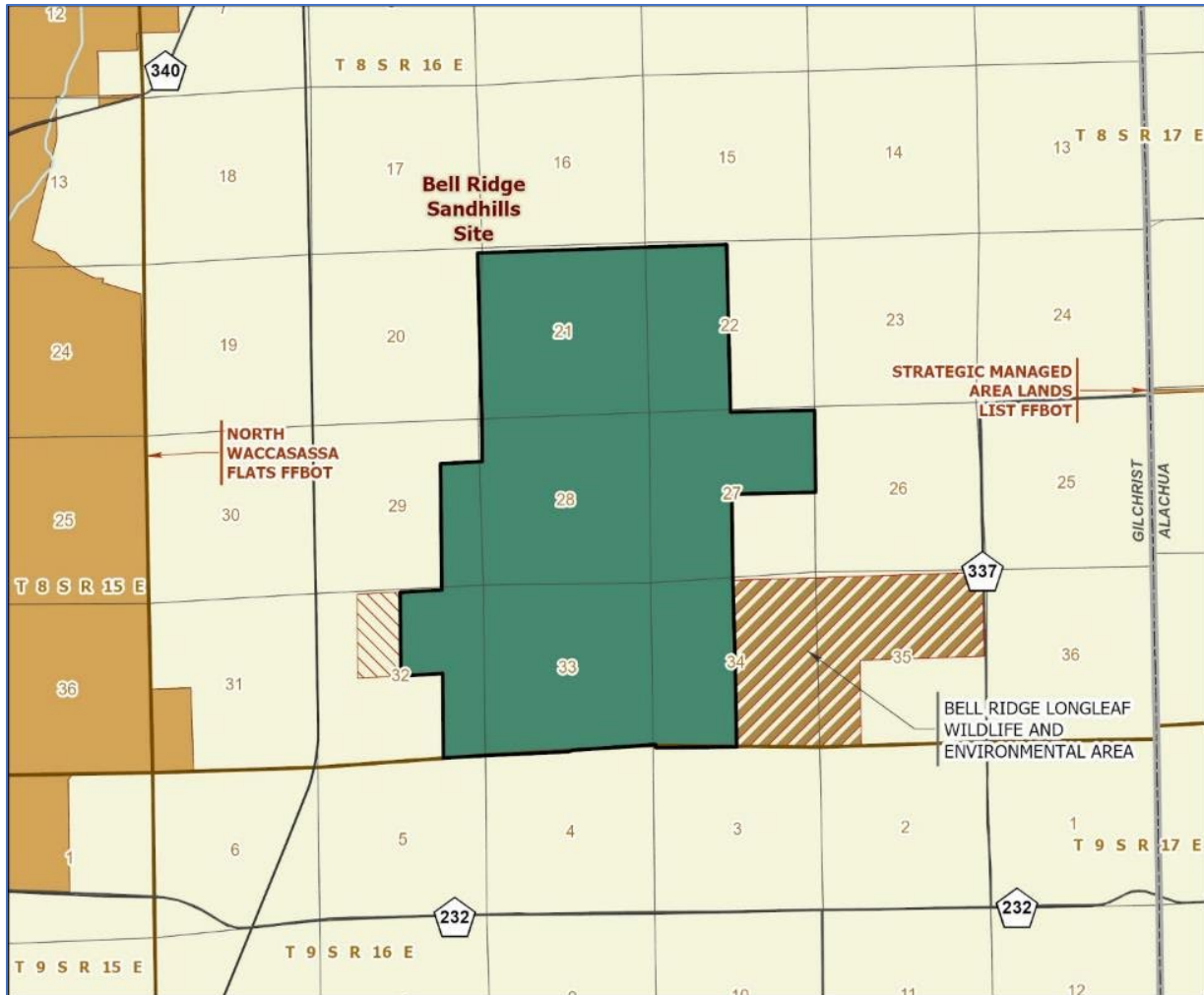
-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Acquired for Conservation (Fee Simple)
-  State Owned Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects



JANUARY 2020



Map 3: FNAI, January 2020



**LONGLEAF PINE ECOSYSTEM: MAP 3**

**GILCHRIST COUNTY**

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

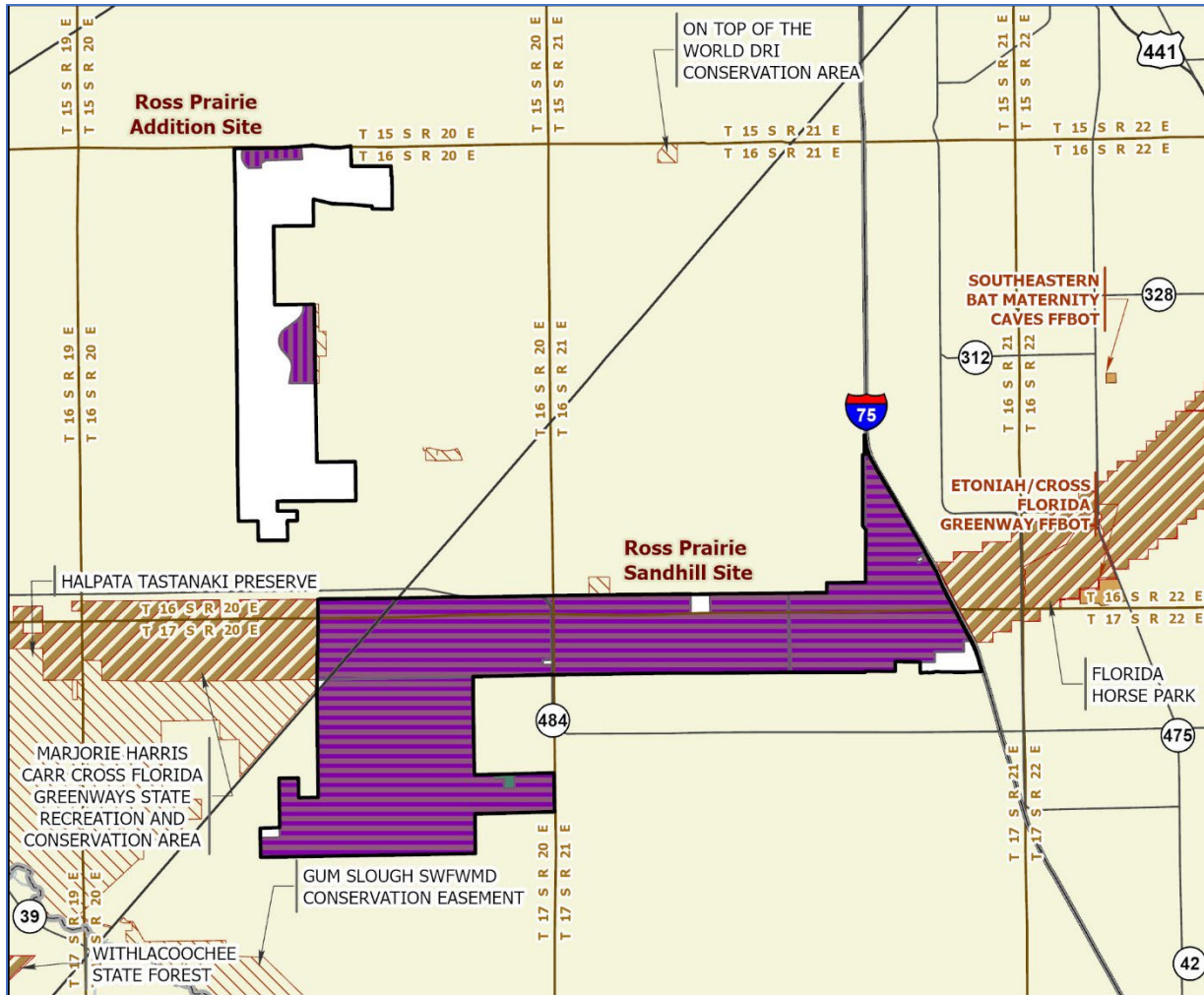


JANUARY 2020



Map 4: FNAI, January 2020

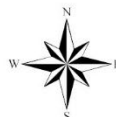
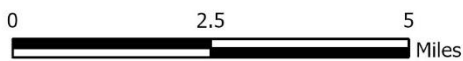




**LONGLEAF PINE ECOSYSTEM: MAP 4**

**MARION COUNTY**

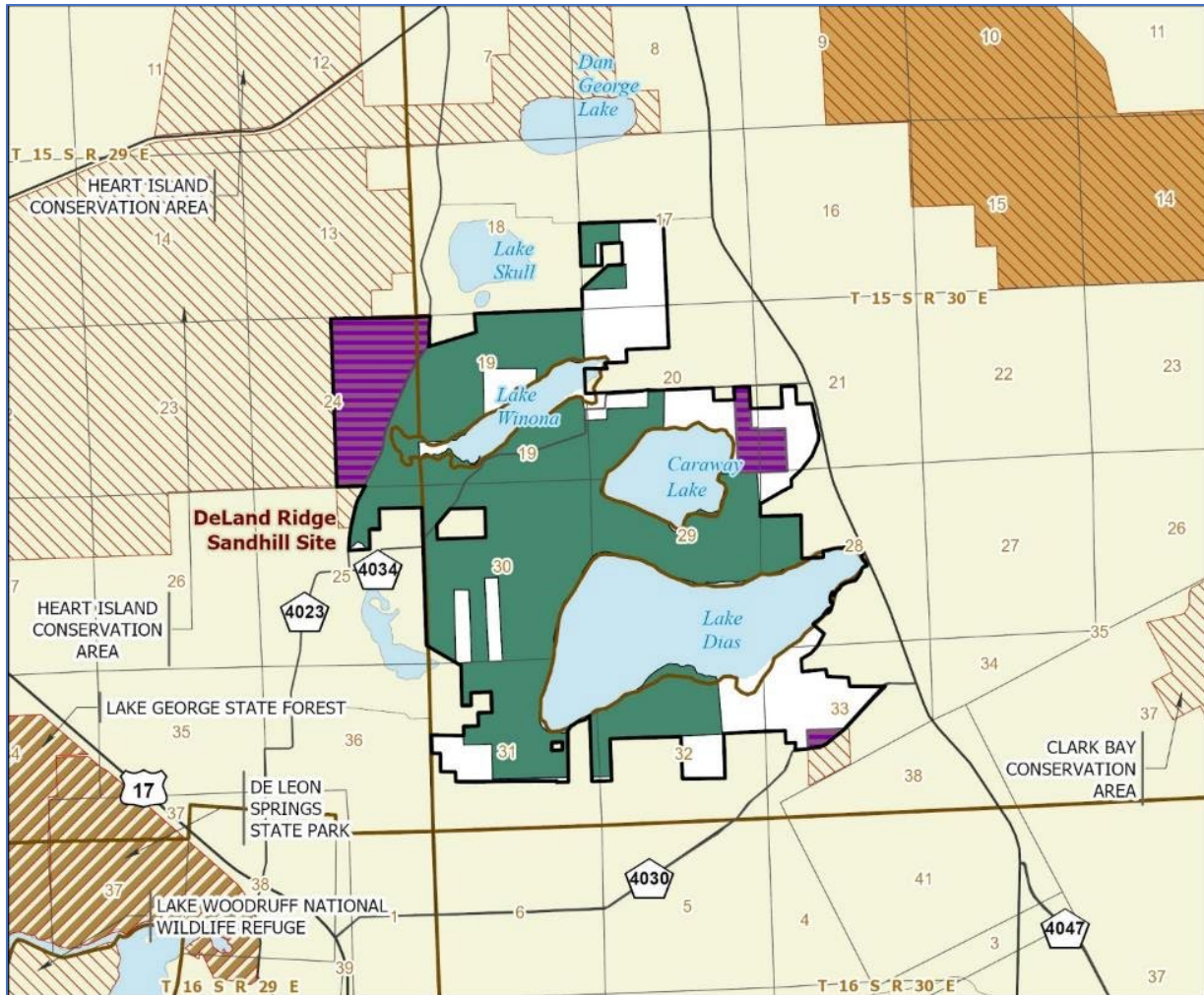
-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Acquired for Conservation (Fee Simple)
-  Acquired for Conservation (Less-Than-Fee)
-  Essential Parcel(s) Remaining
-  State Owned Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects



FEBRUARY 2022

Map 5: FNAI, February 2022





**LONGLEAF PINE ECOSYSTEM: MAP 5**

**VOLUSIA COUNTY**

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

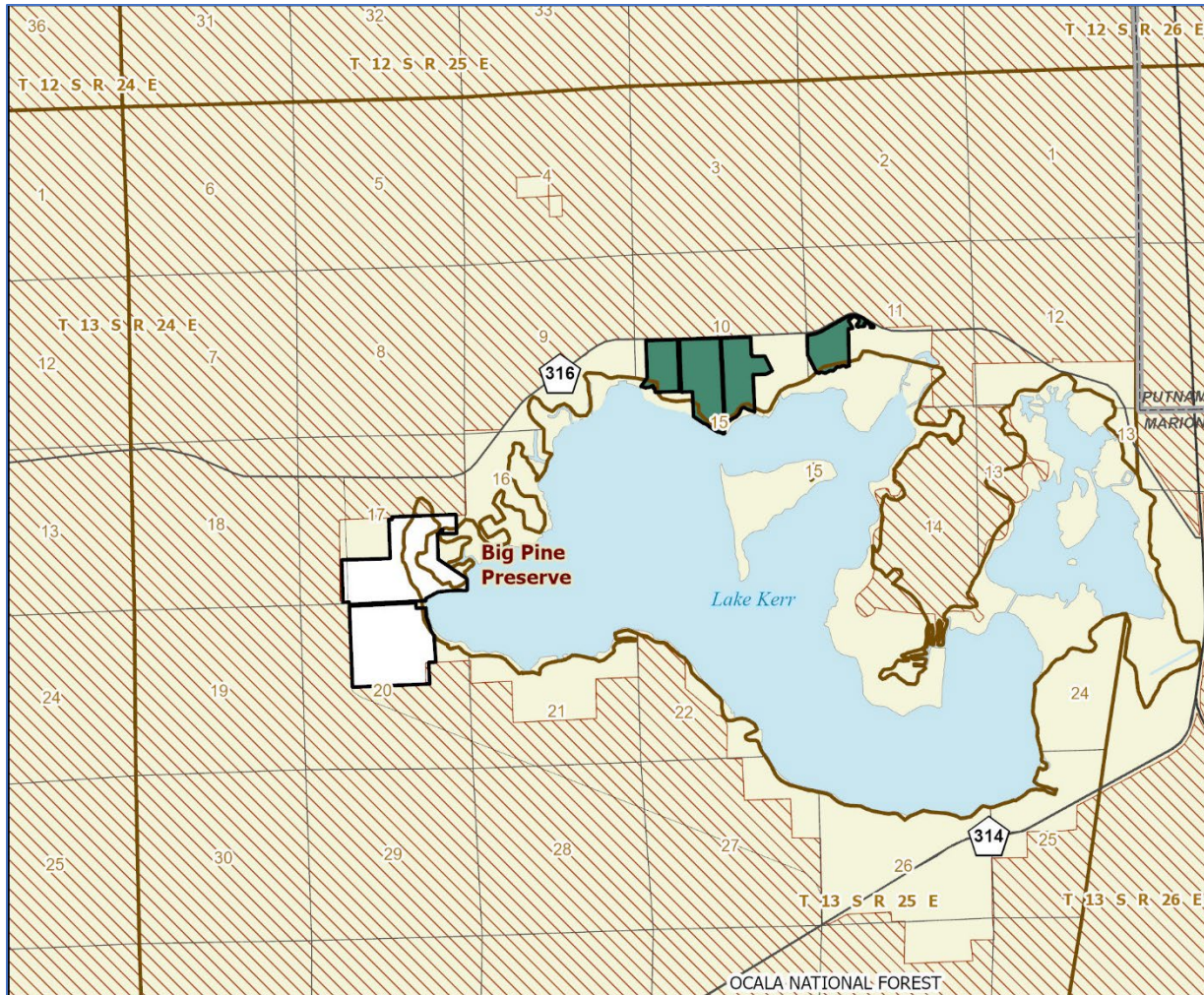


JANUARY 2020






Map 6: FNAI, January 2020





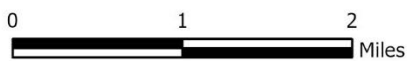
**LONGLEAF PINE ECOSYSTEM: MAP 6**

**MARION COUNTY**

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



FEBRUARY 2022



Map 7: FNAI, February 2022