

Myakka Ranchlands

Less-Than-Fee

DeSoto, Manatee, Sarasota

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2007
<i>Project Acres</i>	49,030
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	18,353
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$22,012,100
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	30,677
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$165,807,659

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Myakka Ranchlands project contains multiple areas, on opposite sides of the Myakka River State Park, that protect a system of conservation areas and make a connection among state, county, and non-profit conservation lands in southwest Florida. Acquiring these lands will support landscape sized protection areas of more than 50,000 acres by adding to the existing 121,000 acres of conservation land already protecting the Myakka River and Charlotte Harbor Estuary. The project will protect lands that are known to have rare plants and animals and protect waters of the state and functional wetlands.

General Description

The original Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever project had 18,737 acres consisting of three ownerships in two disjunct tracts: Hi Hat Ranch in the northwest (10,770 acres) and the combined Walton and Longino Ranches in the southeast (7,969 acres).

On June 27, 2014, the ARC added the proposed Myakka-Peace River Watershed Connector, which abuts it on the east side, as an amendment to the Myakka Ranchlands, adding 5,552 acres.

When the ARC added the 7,564-acre Myakka Island Conservation Corridor proposal to the Myakka Ranchlands on December 12, 2014, that brought the total to 31,853 acres.

The Hi Hat tract is about five miles east of the city limits of Sarasota in the northern part of Sarasota County. The Longino/Walton tract is about thirteen miles southeast of Hi Hat Ranch, between State Road 72 and I-75 in eastern Sarasota County. The eastern edge of the tract abuts the Lewis Longino Preserve, a 3,895-acre conservation easement purchased by Sarasota County and the SWFWMD to protect regional water supplies.

The Hi Hat tract includes 2,500 acres of wastewater spray field owned by the City of Sarasota for which the owners have rights to purchase back from the City. The Hi Hat owners also retain a permit from the SWFWMD for withdrawal of 6-7 million gallons of groundwater per day at the ranch. The properties are crisscrossed with internal roads, access ways and ditches associated with ranch and farming operations. About half of the Hi Hat, Longino and Walton ranches have been converted to pasture, agriculture, or

various uses such as impoundments, canals, roads, and buildings. Most of these areas are improved pasture. The remaining natural areas support a mosaic of mesic flatwoods, depression and basin marshes, prairie and hydric hammocks. About 70 percent of the Myakka-Peace River Watershed Connector ranches are in natural condition. The quality of these natural communities is variable, depending upon the fire history and levels of physical disturbances or invasive exotic plant encroachments. The Myakka Island Conservation Corridor consists of three ranches. Triangle Ranch (1,067 acres) and Sheps Island Ranch (723 acres) are along the Manatee River where Sarasota and Manatee counties join. Orange Hammock Ranch (5,774 acres) borders existing conservation lands on the DeSoto County line. The working ranches have cattle operations, sod farms, row crops, citrus groves, pine and cabbage palm harvesting, and hunting. About ninety percent of the land for the Myakka Island Conservation Corridor parcels are in various degrees of natural condition, with some improved pasture.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Swallow-tailed kite	G5/S2
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
<i>lowland loosestrife</i>	G3/S3
Wood stork	G4/S2
Florida burrowing owl	G4T3/S3
Crested caracara	G5/S2
Roseate spoonbill	G5/S2
Southeastern American kestrel	G5T4/S3
Black-crowned night-heron	G5/S3
Bald eagle	G5/S3
Glossy ibis	G5/S3

Public Use

In the 802 acres within the Hi Hat Ranch to be managed by Sarasota County, some existing roads and trails may become multi-use trails for hiking and horseback riding. Such uses as camping, picnicking, hiking, and boating will be compatible with the protection of the area. Longino Ranch and Walton Ranch, the remainder of Hi Hat Ranch, and the ranches of the Myakka-Peace River Watershed Connector and the Myakka Island Conservation Corridor are proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and do not provide for public access.

Acquisition Planning

This project consists of several large tracts as well as large, subdivided areas. Essential parcels include Sugarmill Woods (acquired), World Woods (acquired by FFS), Florida Crushed Stone, Orange Meadow Corp./Seville (acquired), Blackwell (westernmost tract—acquired by the SWFWMD), Tooke's Lake Joint Venture, and other large hammock and sandhill parcels.



1995

On March 10, 1995, the LAMAC approved adding 990 acres to the project boundary.

2007

On December 14, 2007, the ARC voted to add the Myakka Ranchlands to the A list of Florida Forever projects. The application proposes a combination of full-fee and less-than-fee acquisition. Longino Ranch is less-than-fee; Hi-Hat is fee and/or less-than-fee; and Walton Ranch was proposed as fee simple, but the owner is willing to consider it as a less-than-fee acquisition.

2010

On July 15, 2010, Sarasota County and SWFWMD in partnership purchased for \$22,559,100 fee simple (\$9,023,640) and as a conservation easement (\$13,535,460) 3,760 acres known as Walton Ranch. The partnership ownership interests are 100 percent fee and ten percent CE for the County, and 90 percent CE for SWFWMD.

On August 19, 2010, SWFWMD and Sarasota County in partnership acquired Longino Ranch Conservation Easement (3,981 acres) for \$14,559,000 (Conservation Easement is held jointly by the District and County). This easement has a provision for public access to a recreational trail along the southern property boundary that if developed would connect public ownerships from the Myakka River to the Peace River. On September 27, 2011, SWFWMD and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in partnership purchased a CE (1,237 acres known as Horton Ranch) for \$2,230,000. In 2014, the ARC voted to combine the proposed Myakka-Peace River Watershed Connector with the Myakka Ranchlands project.

2011

On December 9, 2011, the ARC placed this project in the Less-Than-Fee category of projects.

2014

On December 12, 2014, the ARC added the proposed Myakka Island Conservation Corridor as an addition to the Myakka Ranchlands, making the project a total of 31,853 GIS acres.

2015

At the August 2015 ARC meeting, the 543-acre Murphy Marsh parcel was added to the Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever project.

At the October 2015 meeting, upon completion of full proposal reviews, the ARC formally added the 1,356-acre Myakka Addition Lands in Sarasota County and the 2,659-acre Upper Myakka Watershed in Manatee County to the Florida Forever project list, then by motion, added the acreage within the boundaries of those two projects into the existing Myakka Ranchlands Florida Forever project to include.

2016

At the December 2016 ARC meeting, the 4,530-acre Blackbeard's Ranch proposal in southern Manatee County was approved for the Florida Forever list, then added to the Myakka Ranchlands project for its water protection benefits and for its high potential for restoration. The Blackbeard's Ranch addition adjoins Myakka River State Park and is about ten miles east of Sarasota within the Myakka watershed. It



includes the headwaters of two important sloughs in the watershed—Deer Prairie Slough and Mud Slough—that both run south through adjacent conservation lands. This area is home to the Florida black bear, the burrowing owl, the eastern indigo snake and the roseate spoonbill.

2019

On April 19, 2019, the ARC approved adding the 4,044-acre BR Ranch project proposed for less-than-fee acquisition in DeSoto County to the 2020 Florida Forever Priority List, then moved to incorporate the lands within the BR Ranch project boundary into the Myakka Ranchlands project boundary. The proposal had a 2019 tax assessed value of \$11,700,000. This addition would contribute to the natural and hydrological resources as well as increase connectivity with existing conservation lands. BR Ranch will also contribute to the larger landscape that includes Myakka River State Park, Lewis Longino Preserve and T. Mabry Carlton, Jr. Memorial Reserve. The land within the approved boundary was designated as essential. It would be managed with OES oversight if acquired.

On October 18, 2019, the ARC approved adding the 2,393-acre MJ Ranch project proposed for less-than-fee acquisition in Manatee County to the 2020 Florida Forever Priority List, then moved to incorporate the lands within the MJ Ranch into the Myakka Ranchlands project boundary. The proposal had a 2019 tax assessed value of \$5,800,632. This addition would contribute to the natural and hydrological resources and increase connectivity with existing conservation lands. The MJ Ranch's northwestern boundary is a three mile stretch along the Myakka River Watershed, which drains to the Charlotte Harbor. The land within the approved boundary was designated as essential. It would be managed by OES for oversight if acquired.

2021

DEP acquired a conservation easement over 380.20 acres in DeSoto County from the Rawls family.

On August 13, 2021, the ARC approved an addition of approximately 996 acres in Manatee County to the project boundary.

On December 10, 2021, the ARC approved an addition of 576.05 acres in Manatee County to the project boundary.

Coordination

Acquisition of the Myakka Ranchlands would be a shared acquisition along with Sarasota County and the SWFWMD. It is already part of the SWFWMD Florida Forever Work Plan. It abuts the Myakka River State Park. The rest of the project is recommended for less-than-fee acquisitions and therefore would be monitored through OES.

Management Policy Statement

Principal purposes of the project include protection of biodiversity, protection of the quality and natural functions of the land and water systems, availability of sufficient quantities of water and, within the portion to be managed by Sarasota County, provision of resource based public recreational and educational opportunities. Programs would be oriented towards conservation and protection of wildlife



species, and careful control of public uses. The primary land management goals for the management of the tract are 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 and multiple use approach will guide the management activities on this project.

The proposed less-than-fee acquisitions of Myakka Ranchlands would be managed for conservation purposed by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

Manager(s)

Sarasota County Natural Resources, a division of the Sarasota County government, is recommended as the manager of 802 acres of the project once it is acquired, with assistance and cooperation from the SWFWMD and Myakka River State Park. The remainder of Myakka Ranchlands is proposed for less-than-fee acquisitions; management responsibility 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 for the less-than-fee tracts.

Qualifications for state designation

The project's size, diversity, and location make it desirable for use and management compatible with the adjacent state park. Most of the acreage of this project consists of isolated wetlands in oak hammock and improved pasture supporting an active cattle operation. Approximately 20 percent of the proposal has been converted to cattle operations and spray irrigation. The improved pastures total approximately 160 acres with multiple grass species planted in them. Hi Hat Ranch has been managed for cattle for over 40 years and its pastures are devoid of most native groundcover and under story species.

Conditions affecting intensity of management

Much of the project's former dry prairie and pine flatwoods have been altered by cattle operations and spray irrigation fields. Hi Hat Ranch will be fenced and the aboveground spray-irrigation equipment will be removed by the landowner. Hydrological alterations in the form of ditches will be analyzed for potential restoration. Such areas may be restored with native ground cover and canopy. The level of management intensity and related management costs is expected to be minimal to obtain the necessary information and resources to restore and manage this system compatible with the state park. Long-term management costs are expected to be low to maintain this area like the adjacent state park.

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

Once the fee-simple portion of the project is acquired and assigned for management to Sarasota County, existing trails will be evaluated for nature-based recreation use. After the installation of the fence and removal of the above ground spray irrigation equipment by Hi Hat Ranch at no cost to the



project primitive trails will be opened to hikers. Initial and intermediate management efforts will concentrate on resource inventory, providing site security, assessing public and fire management access, and hydrological restoration potential. Inventories of the site's natural resources, its 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 necessitate the development of a road plan to identify which roads will continue to be used for vehicular access by the public, which are required for administrative use, and which are unnecessary for management or access and should be closed. Steps will be taken to ensure that the public is provided appropriate access while simultaneously affording protection of sensitive resources.

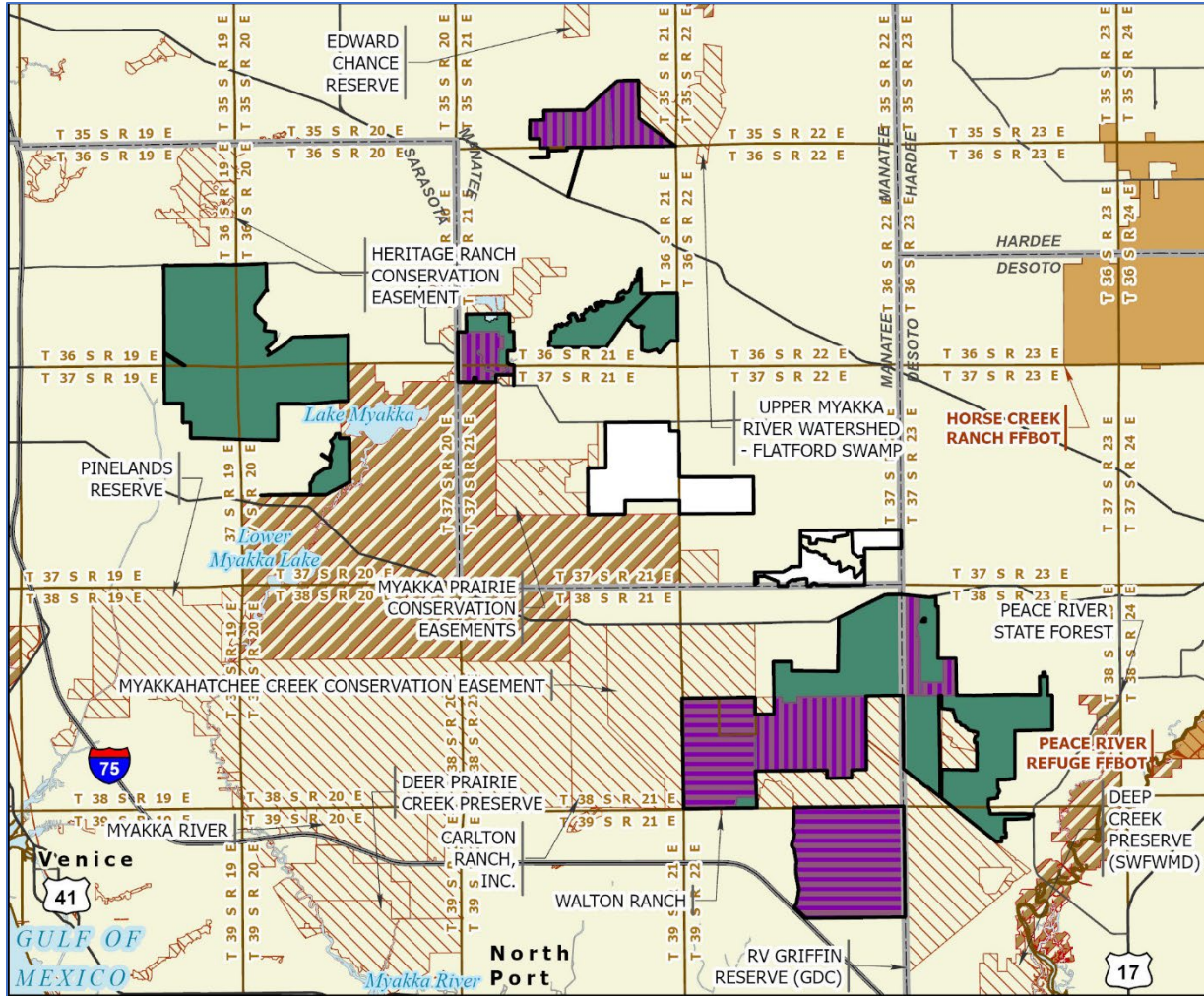
Revenue-generating potential

The revenue-generating potential of the portion managed by Sarasota County is expected to be moderately low. Some future revenues might come from recreational user fees and ecotourism activities if such projects could be economically developed. No capital project expenditures will be needed on the full-fee parcel managed by Sarasota County, but land management activities such as prescribed fire, vegetative restoration, and primitive public access/use will need to be funded. As more information is gathered and an analysis of the site is completed, Sarasota County intends to include project funds contingent on availability.

Cooperators in management activities

Sarasota County proposes to manage the 802-acre section of the project like the adjacent state park and will carry out management activities and coordinate public access and use. Sarasota County will cooperate with and seek the assistance of Myakka River State Park, the SWFWMD and interested parties as appropriate.

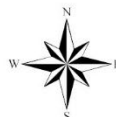
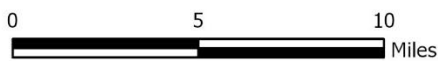




MYAKKA RANGLANDS

DESOTO, MANATEE, AND SARASOTA 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 1: FNAI, February 2022

