

# Old Town Creek Watershed

Less-Than-Fee

Hardee, Polk

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2001
<i>Project Acres</i>	7,303
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	6,039
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$9,790,000
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	1,264
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$5,336,677

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Old Town Creek Watershed project will support the conservation of the natural habitats and improved/working landscapes that constitute the Old Town Watershed.

## General Description

The northeastern corner of the site includes part of the Lake Wales Ridge, a physiographic region of the state that is rich in rare plant and animal species. The site supports many natural communities which are characteristic of south-central Florida. Although a large percentage of the former flatwoods have been converted to improved pasture, they remain important for several rare animals in the region.

Most of the project is proposed as a less-than-fee acquisition. The Crews Ranch owner has indicated a willingness to consider a fee sale of the scrub in the north part of the project. This area is adjacent to TNC's Saddle Blanket Lake Preserve, which allows public visitation. If this scrub area were managed as an extension of that preserve, nature appreciation, natural resource education and nature trails could be made more readily available.

### FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>hartwrightia</i>	G2/S2
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
<i>pygmy fringe tree</i>	G2G3/S2S3
Florida scrub lizard	G2G3/S2S3
<i>cutthroatgrass</i>	G3/S3
Bachman's sparrow	G3/S3
Southeastern American kestrel	G5T4/S3

#### Public Use

Old Town Creek Watershed is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access.

#### Acquisition Planning

##### **2001**

The essential parcels are contained within Crews Ranch. Mallory Ranch (two noncontiguous tracts) is the other ownership in this project boundary. The estimated tax value for the project in 2001 was \$788,200.

On April 6, 2001, the ARC placed this project on the Florida Forever list. On December 9, 2011, the ARC placed this project in the Less-than-Fee list of projects.

##### **2017**

On December 19, 2017, the BOT closed on the over 6,000-acre Crews Ranch conservation easement within the project.

#### Coordination

This project has been submitted to SWFWMD for a Save Our Rivers proposal. SWFWMD is a potential acquisition partner.

#### Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Old Town Creek Watershed 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 Old Town Creek Watershed 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.



**Qualifications for state designation**

Protecting this area will benefit the public in at least three major ways:

This project consists of a matrix of wetland and upland habitats, including a globally imperiled natural community that supports a variety of common and rare plant and animal species and is of a size to qualify as a wildlife management area.

Protecting the watershed and natural habitats surrounding Old Town Creek, which feeds into Charlie Creek and ultimately into the Peace River, from conversion to more intensive uses, particularly dairies or residential development, will help protect the water quality within the region.

The ranches in this region contain large areas of natural lands that should be protected if an ecological connection between the Big Cypress and the Osceola National Forest/Okefenokee Swamp is to be achieved.

**Conditions affecting intensity of management**

This less-than-fee project includes lands requiring monitoring only. The Crews Ranch is a working cattle ranch that is and will continue to be managed by the private landowner. TNC and other land managing agencies will provide management advice and guidance to the landowner as necessary to maintain and enhance the resource management program.

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

During the first year after acquisition, management activities will focus on securing and posting the property and developing a management plan. Existing management activities will continue throughout the management planning process. The property owner will develop a management plan which will include fire management, exotic control and restoration components. Prior to the development of the management plan, the tract's natural resources and threatened/endangered plants and animals and any archaeological and cultural sites will be inventoried and mapped to provide the basis for the management plan. Protection and security of infrastructure and the property will be the responsibility of the private landowner.

**Revenue-generating potential**

No revenue will be generated from this easement.

**Cooperators in management activities**

No cooperators are recommended for this site. However, consultation with the SWFWMD, TNC and FWC could be helpful to the landowner.



