

# Pine Island Slough Ecosystem

Critical Natural Lands

Osceola

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2004
<i>Project Acres</i>	48,973
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	27,079
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	21,895
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$87,566,581

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Pine Island Slough Ecosystem project will increase protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels through the preservation of habitat for several rare species of animals and vascular plants. The project will preserve a unique and intact endemic Florida ecosystem and provide landscape connectivity to Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park. The project will also provide the public with resource-based recreation and educational opportunities such as hiking, camping, nature appreciation, bird watching, and equestrian trails. This project may also help complete the Florida National Scenic Trail, a statewide non-motorized trail that crosses a number of Florida Forever project sites.

## General Description

The Pine Island Slough Ecosystem project consists of approximately 48,973 acres in Osceola and Indian River Counties. This landscape of intact ecological upland and wetland habitat is reminiscent of the kind of landscape that once dominated Central Florida in pre-European settlement times. It is contiguous with the Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, which is noted for its high-quality resource values. The project's acquisition would allow for the protection and management of additional high-quality habitats in an area of Florida with significant vertebrate wildlife, hydrological values and other important natural resource attributes.

### FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Florida grasshopper sparrow	G5T1/S1
Florida scrub-jay	G1G2/S1S2
Red-cockaded woodpecker	G3/S2
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
<i>large-flowered rosemary</i>	G3/S3
<i>nodding pinweed</i>	G3/S3
Eastern diamondback rattlesnake	G3/S3
Crested caracara	G5/S2

#### Public Use

The size, resource values and location of the Pine Island Slough project provides a potential for a diverse recreational experience. The size, location and high resource quality of Pine Island Slough offers potential for recreational activities typically envisioned on state-owned conservation land (i.e., this would not include the more intensively developed uses like ball fields, playgrounds, off-road- vehicle or motocross tracks). Since its principal purposes include protection of biodiversity, and provision of resource-based public recreational and educational opportunities, programs would be oriented towards conservation and protection of wildlife species, with careful control of public uses.

Development of facilities, as on all WMA, would be the minimal amount necessary to assure a high-quality recreational experience. Development would be confined to areas of previous disturbance.

#### Acquisition Planning

##### **2004**

On August 20, 2004, the ARC added the Pine Island Slough Ecosystem project to Group A of the Florida Forever 2004 Priority list. This fee-simple acquisition, by TNC, consisted of approximately 49,583 acres, a single owner, Latt Maxcy Corp., and a 2003 estimated tax assessed value of \$13,144,221.

##### **2005**

On June 5, 2005, the ARC moved Pine Island Slough Ecosystem to the Group B list.

##### **2011**

On December 9, 2011, the ARC placed this project in the Critical Natural Lands list of projects.

##### **2020**

On November 28, 2020, the DeLuca Preserve was gifted to the University of Florida Foundation, with a conservation easement belonging to Ducks Unlimited. The DeLuca Preserve is approximately 27,000 acres and preserves over half of the Pine Island Slough Ecosystem project.

#### Coordination

OES is pursuing partnerships with SFWMD and the counties. TNC is considered a partner on this project.



### **Management Policy Statement**

FWC proposes to manage the Pine Island Slough project for protection and management of high ecological quality habitats in an area of Florida with significant vertebrate wildlife, hydrological values and other important natural resource attributes. It is contiguous with the Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, which is noted for its high-quality resource values. This area should be restored to a natural character to the greatest extent possible. The placement of facilities shall be restricted to existing disturbed areas. Public and private uses that are incompatible or would interfere with the protection, restoration or management of the natural resources, for which this project is to be acquired, shall be prohibited.

### **Manager(s)**

FWC has been designated as the lead manager.

### **Management Prospectus**

#### **Qualifications for state designation**

The proposed project would be expected to provide additional habitat for many focal species, which according to FWC, are indicators of natural communities, and suitable habitat conditions for other wildlife species. The list of species documented or reported to occur within the proposal predicts that as many as five focal species may occur on the property. FWC environmental resource analysis shows strategic habitat conservation areas to exist within the Pine Island Slough proposed project for three species: crested caracara, Florida grasshopper sparrow and the mottled duck. Many important conservation lands have become increasingly isolated and no longer support viable populations of large widely ranging mammals and other species of wildlife. Florida Forever identifies projects which provide for increased connectivity across the landscape, and which serve as ecological greenways, which provide improved habitats for fish and wildlife, opportunities for outdoor recreation, and improved conservation of other natural resources. The Pine Island Slough Ecosystem proposed project would contribute to landscape connectivity by means of linkage to existing managed areas, and especially if acquisition of adjoining or nearby Florida Forever projects can be accomplished. These Florida Forever projects in the conservation landscape surrounding the Pine Island Slough Ecosystem proposal include the Bombing Range Ridge project, the Kissimmee-St. Johns River Connector project, and the Ranch Reserve project.

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

Some portions of the project include lands that are low-need tracts, requiring application of resource management methods, including the frequent use of prescribed fire where appropriate. However, since an estimated 47% of the project area has been disturbed for silviculture or other purposes, additional methods would be necessary for some management units in order to accomplish objectives for restoration to a desired future condition. FWC would conduct historic vegetation analysis to determine appropriate desired future conditions, objectives, and restoration methods. This is especially important for conservation of habitats and populations of imperiled or rare species. The primary methods for perpetuation of the less disturbed natural communities might involve, for example, the reintroduction



of prescribed fire and control of human uses in certain management units. Although exotic plants have not yet been observed to pose an imminent threat to the ecological integrity of the proposed project, there will be surveillance for, and removal of such infestations of exotic invasive species.

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

During the first year after acquisition, emphasis would be placed on site security, posting boundaries, public access, fire management, resource inventory and removal of refuse. A conceptual management plan would be developed by FWC describing the management goals and specific objectives necessary to implement future resource management. Long-range goals would emphasize ecosystem management and the conservation of fish and wildlife. After the inventory of the plant community and historic vegetation is finished, quantified vegetation management objectives would be developed using the FWC objective-based vegetation management process. Essential roads would be stabilized to provide all-weather public access and management operations. Programs providing multiple recreational uses would also be implemented. An all-season prescribed burning management plan would be developed and implemented using conventional and biologically acceptable methods. Natural plant communities would be managed to benefit native wildlife resources. Growing season prescribed burning would be used where appropriate to best achieve management objectives. These resources would be managed using acceptable silvicultural practices where appropriate, practical, and in pursuit of wildlife habitat objectives. Archaeological and historic sites would be managed in coordination with DHR. Potential for these sites to occur in the project area is moderate.

**Revenue-generating potential**

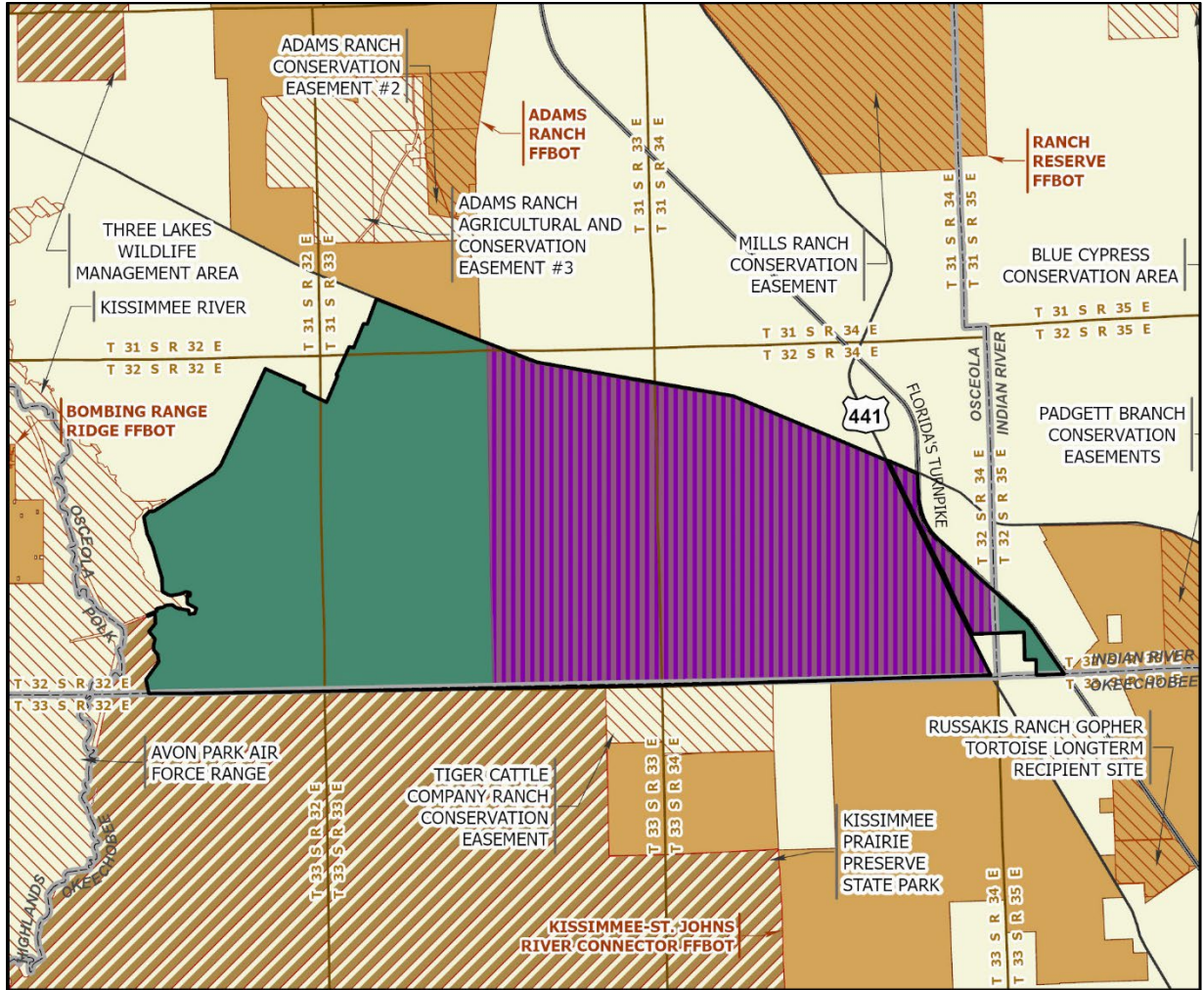
Management would seek to improve the revenue-generating potential of areas currently in forest products production by improving wildlife diversity and resource-based recreation in such areas. Additional revenue would be generated from sales of hunting licenses, fishing licenses, wildlife management area stamps and other special hunting stamps. Some revenues might be realized in the future from recreational user fees and ecotourism activities if such projects could be economically developed.

Management Cost Summary

FWC	Startup	Recurring
Source of Funds	CARL	CARL
Resource Management	\$598,900	\$790,661
Administration	\$75,494	\$25,133
Support	\$149,080	\$31,566
Capital Improvements	\$1,091,187	\$137,415
Visitor Services/Recreation	\$1,888	\$141
Law Enforcement	\$34,511	\$34,511
TOTAL	\$1,951,060	\$1,019,426

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





**PINE ISLAND SLOUGH ECOSYSTEM**

**INDIAN RIVER AND OSCEOLA 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



FEBRUARY 2022



Map 1: FNAI, February 2022