

Ranch Reserve

Less-Than-Fee

Brevard, Indian River, Osceola

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	1997
<i>Project Acres</i>	36,410
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	23,891
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$10,773,500
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	12,519
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$50,870,091

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Ranch Reserve project includes a vast area of open lands—pastures, pine flatwoods, palmetto prairies, and marshes—west of the St. Johns River. These flatlands are important for wildlife like sandhill cranes, caracara, red-cockaded woodpeckers, and an experimental group of extremely rare whooping cranes. The Ranch Reserve project will ensure that a large part of these lands will remain as they are today, to preserve a connection of open land with public lands to the north and east, and to maintain or increase the diversity of wildlife on this wide plain.

General Description

The Ranch Reserve's four cattle ranches lie on the Osceola Plain west of and above the St. Johns River marshes. Mesic flatwoods interrupted by depression marshes cover about 40 percent of the project area. Swamps and hammocks make up much of the remaining natural communities. Improved pastures cover about 30 percent of the area. At least 24 FNAI-listed animals are known or reported in the project, including the red-cockaded woodpeckers and one of the largest populations of sandhill cranes in Florida. The FWC has released whooping cranes on the SJRWMD's Escape Ranch in an attempt to reestablish the species in Florida. The project includes the headwaters of several streams that flow into the St. Johns River marsh. The wildlife habitat in the project is threatened by harvest of old-growth pines and conversion to more intensive agriculture or to non-agricultural use.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Red-cockaded woodpecker	G3/S2
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
Eastern indigo snake	G3/S2?
Whooping crane	G1/SNR
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Crested caracara	G5/S2
Florida burrowing owl	G4T3/S3
Bachman's sparrow	G3/S3
Bald eagle	G5/S3
Southeastern fox squirrel	G5T5/S3

Public Use

This project qualifies as a wildlife management area; the amount and type of public use will be negotiated with the landowners.

Acquisition Planning

1996

On October 30, 1996, the LAMAC adopted criteria for establishing a Less-Than-Fee acquisition category:

- 1) resource value of the project/tract can be adequately protected through a less-than-fee instrument;
- 2) seller is willing to accept a less-than-fee- simple instrument and LAMAC has determined that the project's or site's acquisition objectives can be met by acquiring a less-than-fee interest; and
- 3) manager is willing to oversee a less-than-fee-simple instrument.

On December 5, 1996, the LAMAC transferred the remaining ownerships within the Ranch Reserve project boundary—Campbell (acquired), Mills (acquired), Kelly/Bronson and Kaup—to the Less-Than-Fee group. The SJRWMD has acquired a conservation easement over the large central tract—Escape Ranch.

2000

In 2000, the BOT acquired a conservation easement over the Mills Ranch.

2011

On December 9, 2011, the ARC placed this project in the less-than-fee category in the Florida Forever list.

Coordination

SJRWMD is an acquisition partner with the state and has acquired substantial acreage within the project area. TNC is an acquisition partner also.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Ranch Reserve 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 Ranch Reserve 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

The size of the Ranch Reserve project and its importance to wildlife, particularly to birds such as sandhill cranes and red-cockaded woodpeckers, qualify it as a WMA.

Conditions affecting intensity of management

The project generally includes lands requiring monitoring only and minimum-intensity management.

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

Within the first year after acquisition, the District will take aerial photographs to record the condition of each ranch and begin to inventory natural resources on site. Landowners will develop management and monitoring plans to address site security, monitor and control public access, and implement fire management. Long-range plans will stress ecosystem management and the protection and management of rare species. Forest communities will be managed using techniques recommended by FFS. Appropriate protections will be provided to environmentally sensitive areas. Minimal infrastructure development will be required.

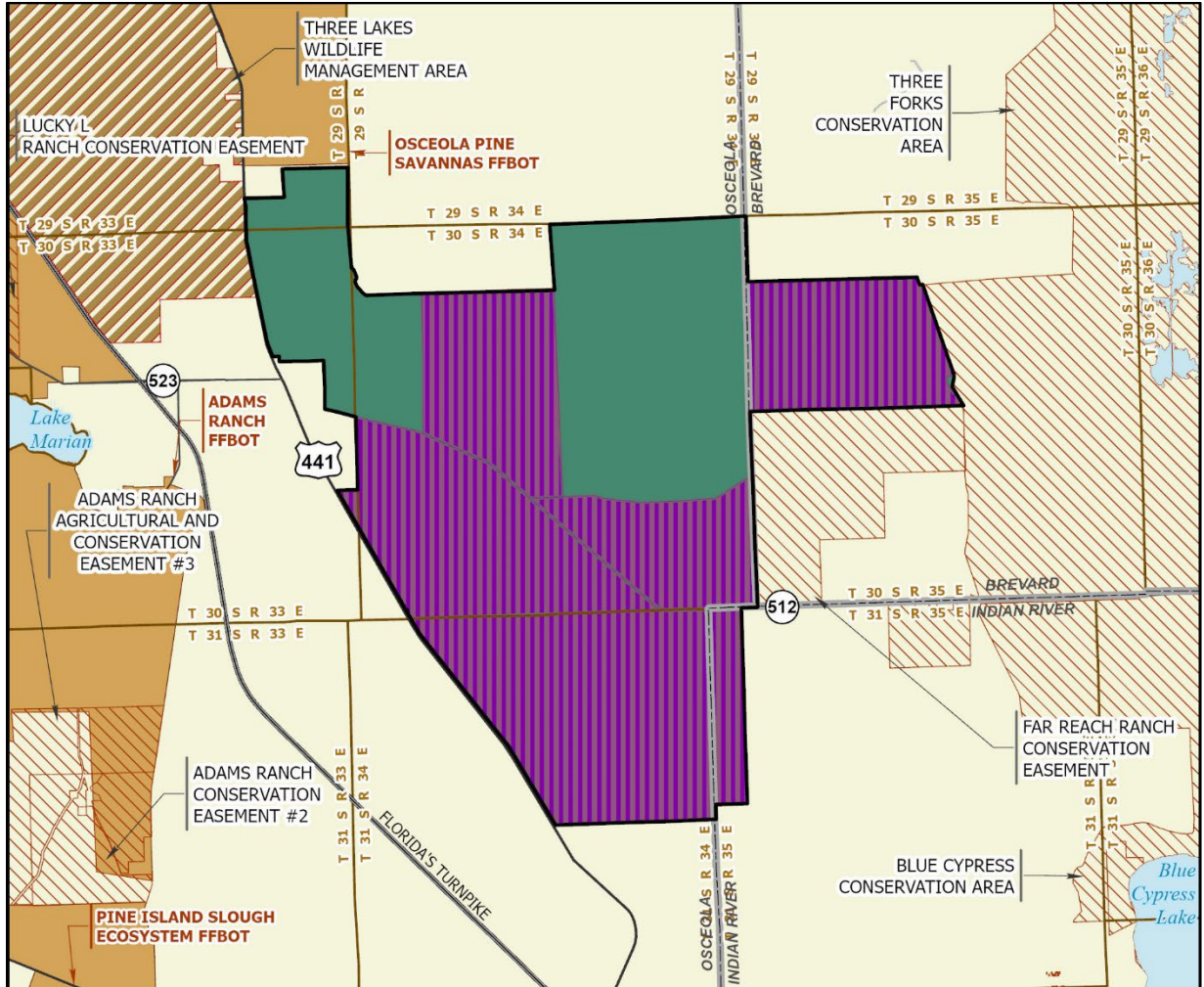
Revenue-generating potential

The underlying fee ownership will remain with the present landowners, so no public revenue is anticipated from this area.

Cooperators in management activities

SJRWMD will cooperate with other state and local government agencies in monitoring land in the project.





RANCH RESERVE

BREVARD, 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