

Red Hills Conservation

Less-Than-Fee

Jefferson, Leon

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2019
<i>Project Acres</i>	16,951
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	0
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	16,951
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$56,606,328

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Red Hills Conservation project will increase the protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels through the protection, restoration, and maintenance of the quality and natural functions of land, water, and wetland systems of the Red Hills region. The project will increase the amount of forest land available for sustainable management of natural resources and preserve significant archaeological or historic sites.

General Description

The Red Hills Conservation (RHC) project includes lands in three plantations. In western Leon County, Cherokee Plantation is located 6.3 miles north of Bradfordville along U.S. Highway 319. The 5,536-acre property extends from Lake Iamonia eastward 4.5 miles to Old Centerville Road. Ring Oak Plantation, 5,322 acres, is also in Leon County, about 0.25 miles east of the town of Miccosukee. All the property is on the eastern side of State Road 59, and the entire eastern border is the shore of Lake Miccosukee. The third property, Norias Hunt Club includes 5,976.4 acres and is located 2.4 miles northeast of the town of Miccosukee along T. S. Green/Lake Roads.

Conservation easements near the project lands include a 48-acre conservation easement on U.S. Highway 319, protecting the scenic byway from any future development. A second 47-acre conservation easement was completed in 2014 on the only outlet for Lake Iamonia, protecting a vital waterway connection to Foshalee Slough. Additionally, another parcel of 1,752 acres adjacent to the proposal is protected with a conservation easement held by Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy.

The properties are in what is commonly termed as the 'Red Hills region', characterized by rolling, moderately well drained uplands with clay soils overlain by loamy sands, and isolated lakes and depressional wetlands. Upland vegetation primarily resembles the upland pine natural community, although much of this was altered historically to support agriculture, chiefly cotton. The "upland pine" now growing on former old fields generally supports a flora lacking some key native components including wiregrass. Although longleaf pine historically dominated the canopy, these sites are now

dominated by loblolly, shortleaf, and slash pine, with occasional small pockets of mature longleaf pine. There are numerous agricultural food plots and a grid of chopped or mowed lanes to aid hunting activities within these open canopied pinelands. The pinelands are generally managed with chopping, mowing, and prescribed fire.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
<i>Miccosukee gooseberry</i>	G1/S1
Red-cockaded woodpecker	G3/S2
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>hyssopleaf hedgenettle</i>	G5T1Q/S1
<i>Turk's cap lily</i>	G5/S1
Bald eagle	G5/S3
Southeastern fox squirrel	G5T5/S3

Public Use

The Red Hills Conservation project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access. However, the Tallahassee Astronomical Society supports the acquisition of RHC because its continued operation as plantation protects the area from light pollution that comes with residential and commercial development. While the less-than-fee project will not provide opportunities for public recreation on the property itself, the protection to water quality afforded by an easement will indirectly protect public recreation sites.

The landowner, Gem Land Company, has demonstrated a willingness to ensure public access to Lake Miccosukee by selling land to Leon County to create Cypress Landing and allowing the public to use its road to access Hopkins Landing. There are several existing conservation easements surrounding these lakes and this project would fill gaps in resource protection in an area of Leon County with high development pressure.

Acquisition Planning

2019

On April 2, 2019 ARC voted to add this project to the Less than Fee category.

Coordination

Establishing the property as an easement would help achieve objectives in FWC's Gopher Tortoise Management Plan that pertain to increasing the amount of protected tortoise habitat on private lands.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Red Hills Conservation project would be managed for conservation purposes by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.



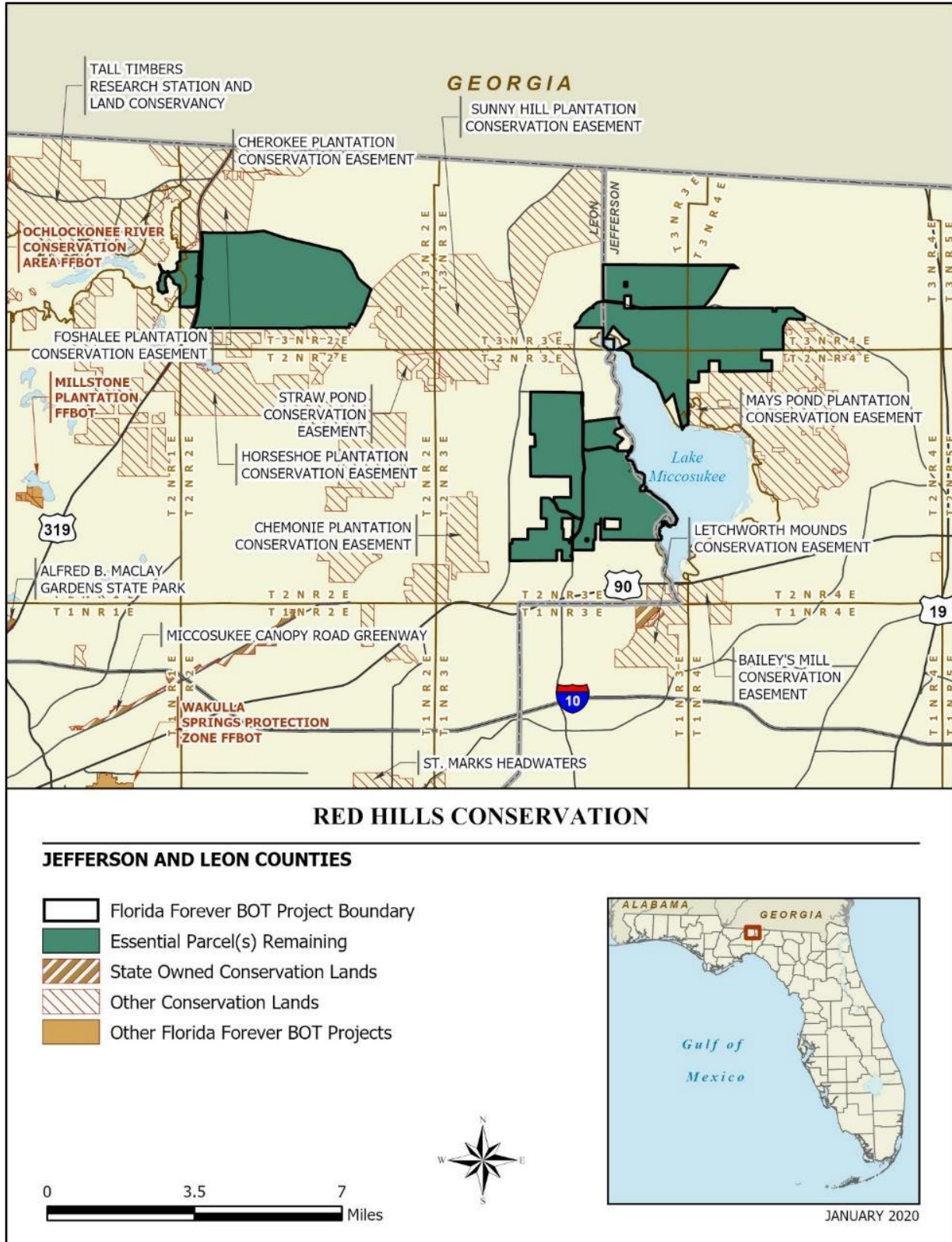
Manager(s)

If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of the Red Hills Conservation area 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.





Map 1: FNAI, January 2020