

San Pedro Bay

Critical Natural Lands

Madison, Taylor

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2003
<i>Project Acres</i>	44,999
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	0
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	44,999
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$33,620,354

Propose for State Acquisition

The San Pedro Bay project will protect a large low area between the Suwannee and Econfinia Rivers and contains pine plantations interspersed with basin swamps and baygalls. Acquisition would expand hunting opportunities and may help complete the Florida National Scenic Trail, a statewide non-motorized trail that crosses several Florida Forever project sites.

General Description

This fee simple acquisition proposal is owned by Wachovia and the Foley Timber and Land Company and consists primarily of wet timberland interspersed with basin swamps and baygalls. The proposal has been revised to include two parcels: a large parcel in Taylor and Madison counties between CR 14 and CR 53, and a smaller, 3,000-acre parcel in Taylor County. Conservation lands near the proposal include the Hixtown Swamp Florida Forever project and several SRWMD conservation areas.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4

Public Use

The consumptive recreational uses on the area consist of hunting with a limited amount of bank fishing. The game species hunted are primarily deer, hog, and turkey hunting. Deer populations are low but could increase with added protection and habitat improvement. Protection could be improved by securing boundaries, limiting access roads, and installing entrance gates. Wading birds and aquatic animals such as amphibians and reptiles that are present would benefit from applied management such as prescribed burning. State ownership would offer potential for wildlife viewing and nature study that could be improved with viewing towers or elevated walkways to offer vistas of the swamp habitat. Outdoor recreation opportunities on the property include hunting, camping, hiking, horseback riding, bicycling and picnicking

Acquisition Planning

The San Pedro Bay project is approximately 44,999 acres in tracts in Madison and Taylor counties. The Wachovia ownership includes the Madison tract (about 19,742 acres) and the Taylor tract (about 3,120 acres) and has been acquired by Regions Bank. The Foley tract is about 25,900 acres. This proposal is being offered for a fee simple acquisition for the two ownerships. The Wachovia tract was acquired from the Gilman Trust in 1999 and has historically managed the pine timber for chip and saw rotations. The Foley tract is adjacent to the Wachovia Madison tract on the western border. Currently FWC has a lease over this area for a WMA. The tax-assessed value is \$7,898,471.

2003

On December 5, 2003, the ARC added the project to the Florida Forever project list. The project had an estimated tax assessed value in 2003 of \$7,898,471.

2011

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

Coordination

FWC and FFS are acquisition partners on this project.

Management Policy Statement

This project is part of San Pedro Bay, a distinct wetland system extending between the Suwannee and Econfina rivers. It is the largest area of privately owned roadless land remaining in Florida. The San Pedro Bay project includes two owners and is designed to protect a large wetland system and the waters that receive its flow. Two parcels are proposed for fee simple acquisition as follows: The first parcel has two owners, and is 41,666 acres in Madison and Taylor counties, stretching 16 miles from east to west between County Road 14 and County Road 53. The second parcel has one owner, and has 3,121 acres located in Taylor County, two miles south of the first parcel. One part of the proposed project drains westward to the Gulf of Mexico via the Fenholloway and Econfina Rivers; the other part of the project drains eastward via canals to the Suwannee River. Much of the central area of the proposed project has no clear drainage pattern.

The project is about five miles south of Madison, seven miles northeast of Perry, and 45 miles east of Tallahassee. The project consists primarily of wetlands resulting from a water table perched on top of a clay layer, which retains water on the surface and impedes movement of water into the underlying Floridan aquifer. Natural communities make up about 49 percent of the San Pedro Bay proposal; the remaining 51 percent is in silviculture. Natural communities within the project include basin marsh, baygall, dome swamp and wet flatwoods. Most of the larger baygalls and dome swamps have been selectively logged in recent years. Basin marsh, including some interspersed wet flatwoods, is 5,653 acres of the project, and appears to be largely in a natural condition. Wet flatwoods comprise 22,822 acres interspersed with 16,252 acres of baygall and dome swamp. In the area where silviculture occurs,

planted wet flatwoods includes an understory of native herbs and shrubs. Raised beds are used to improve growth of pine trees on poorly drained soils.

FNAI Florida Forever Measures Evaluation indicates that 20 percent (8,756 acres) of the project area is under-represented natural communities. Imperiled or rare animal species documented to occur on the project include the Florida black bear, great egret, the little blue heron, snowy egret, white ibis, and wood stork. Other imperiled or rare animal species that are expected to occur in the project include Bachman's sparrow, eastern indigo snake, gopher tortoise, and swallow-tailed kite. The American alligator has also been observed on the project.

Game species are present in relatively low densities among scattered habitat for white-tailed deer and wild turkey. Other game species having been observed on the area include the common snipe, eastern gray squirrel, mourning dove, and rabbits.

This project provides habitat for larger, more widely ranging species such as the Florida black bear, and is significant as an ecological greenway, with the entire project area qualifying as either priority 3 or 7 in potential importance, according to FNAI. The project would improve feasibility of establishing a landscape linkage with coastal publicly owned bear habitat on the Aucilla and Big Bend WMAs, and the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. Other nearby conservation lands include: Hixtown Swamp Florida Forever project three miles northeast of the project; Twin Rivers State Forest along the Suwannee River, six miles to the east; and the Econfina Conservation Area along the Econfina River, miles to the west. The rare plant species occurring in the project area include pitcher plants in smaller areas of herbaceous wetlands. It is expected that additional rare and imperiled biota, yet to be documented, occur in the project area.

The San Pedro Bay project is of sufficient size for large-scale ecosystem management and restoration, as part of the larger San Pedro Bay wetland system. Successful restoration of important ecological and hydrological functions might require additional project design. Hydrological restoration would improve fish and wildlife resources, as well as opportunities for outdoor recreation. However, hydrological restoration could diminish certain types of public access due to increased water levels and wetland function.

Manager(s)

FFS and FWC are recommended as unified managers of the fee simple portions of the project that are acquired.

Management Prospectus

Qualifications for state designation

The landscape ecology of this project provides connectivity among existing and proposed conservation lands, large areas of forest, functional wetlands (71 percent, or 31,936 acres of project area), and protection of surface water (57 percent, or 25,379 acres of project area) and natural floodplain function (11 percent, or 4,833 acres of project area). Since the project goals include protection of biodiversity,



and provision of natural resource-based public recreational and educational opportunities, programs would be developed that serve to manage ecosystems for multiple use. Management programs would conserve, protect, manage and/or restore important ecosystems, landscapes, wildlife populations, forests and water resources. Stands of timber would be managed using even age and/or uneven aged methods to maintain a broad diversity of age classes and canopy conditions that promote groundcover development and enhancement of wildlife. This would provide habitat for the full spectrum of species found in the natural environment and enhance and maintain biodiversity. The project area will be managed to provide recreation opportunities best suited to the characteristics of the site, as well as the needs of user groups. Currently, recreational use of the site consists of bicycling, canoeing, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, and wildlife viewing. Trails may be used as multi-use trails. DEP and University of Florida Statewide Greenways System Planning Project shows 66 percent (29,340 acres) of the project area suitable for priority 1 recreational trails. The managing agencies would promote recreation and environmental education in the natural environment. This project contributes to the following goals identified in the Florida Forever Act (259.105(4), F.S.): Increase the protection of Florida's biodiversity at the species, natural community, and landscape levels; Protect, restore, and maintain the quality and natural functions of land, water, and wetland systems of the state; Ensure that sufficient quantities of water are available to meet the current and future needs of natural systems and the citizens of the state; Increase natural resource-based public recreational and educational opportunities; Increase the amount of forestland available for sustainable management of natural resources.

Conditions affecting intensity of management

Most of the project area is a high-need tract, requiring significant up-front design and engineering analysis to restore natural hydrologic functions. Under unified management, FFS and FWC will utilize in-house expertise in plant community restoration to develop long-term hydrologic goals and objectives in the conceptual management plan (CMP). Off-site timber species may require thinning or removal to promote the regeneration of native ground covers and appropriate tree species. Areas where pine has been harvested, but not yet replanted, will require reforestation of native pine species best suited for soil and moisture conditions, and at stocking levels that restore natural plant and wildlife community characteristics. Managing agencies would conduct historic vegetation analysis to determine appropriate desired future conditions, and restoration methods and tools. This is especially important for conserving habitats and populations of imperiled or rare species. The primary methods and tools for perpetuating less disturbed natural communities might include introducing prescribed fire, controlling human uses and removing invasive exotic species. Because many imperiled or rare species are expected to occur in the project, biotic surveys would be conducted as part of early unified management activities. Facilities for public use and administration would feature rustic facilities and be kept to the minimum necessary to assure a high-quality recreational experience. Such development would be confined to areas of previous disturbance.



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

It is anticipated that during the first year after acquisition, both agencies under the unified management approach will emphasize site security, posting boundaries, public access for low-intensity outdoor recreation, fire management, resource inventory, and removing refuse. Both managing agencies will meet frequently to coordinate task assignments, and cooperate with, and seek the assistance of other state agencies, local governments, and other appropriate participants. Goals for the long term would emphasize multiple use management and conserving the site's natural resources including timber, fish and wildlife, and water. These goals would include restoring habitat and hydrology and conserving and protecting imperiled or rare species of flora and fauna. Because of past drainage and dewatering activities for silviculture, an extensive hydrologic analysis will be performed to guide long-term restoration strategies. Other concurrent assessments will include completing a plant community inventory and historic vegetation analysis. Where practical, disturbed sites would be restored to conditions expected to occur in naturally functioning ecosystems. Essential roads would be stabilized to provide all-weather public access and management operations. Programs providing recreational uses would also be implemented. An all-season prescribed burning management plan would be developed and implemented. Timber resources will be managed using acceptable silviculture practices. Thinning of timber and sustainable forestry management practices, could provide silvicultural products, ecological, and recreational benefits. Archaeological and historic sites would be managed in coordination with the Department of State's Division of Historical Resources. Infrastructure for management would be protected to the extent possible. Infrastructure development would be the minimum to serve needs of the public and would include facilities for the security and management of the project area.

Revenue-generating potential

Timber sales would be conducted as needed to improve or maintain desirable conditions, under a multiple-use management concept. FNAI indicates that 44 percent (19,834 acres) of the project area is available as priorities 1, 2, 3, and 5 for sustainable forestry. However, management would seek to improve the other revenue-generating potential of areas currently serving for forest products production by improving wildlife diversity and resource-based recreation. Additional revenue would be generated from sales of hunting licenses, fishing licenses, wildlife management area permits, and other special hunting permits. Some revenues might be realized in the future from recreational user fees, and ecotourism activities, if such projects can be economically developed. Fifteen percent of all gross revenues will be returned to the county from which funds were generated. Both agencies have agreed to a unified management framework whereby all CARL management funds, site generated revenues, and management expenditures are to be evenly divided between the FFS and FWC.

Cooperators in management activities

The unified managers (FFS and FWC) should cooperate with other state and local governmental agencies, including the SRWMD, in managing the project area. The project should be designated as a state forest and WMA.

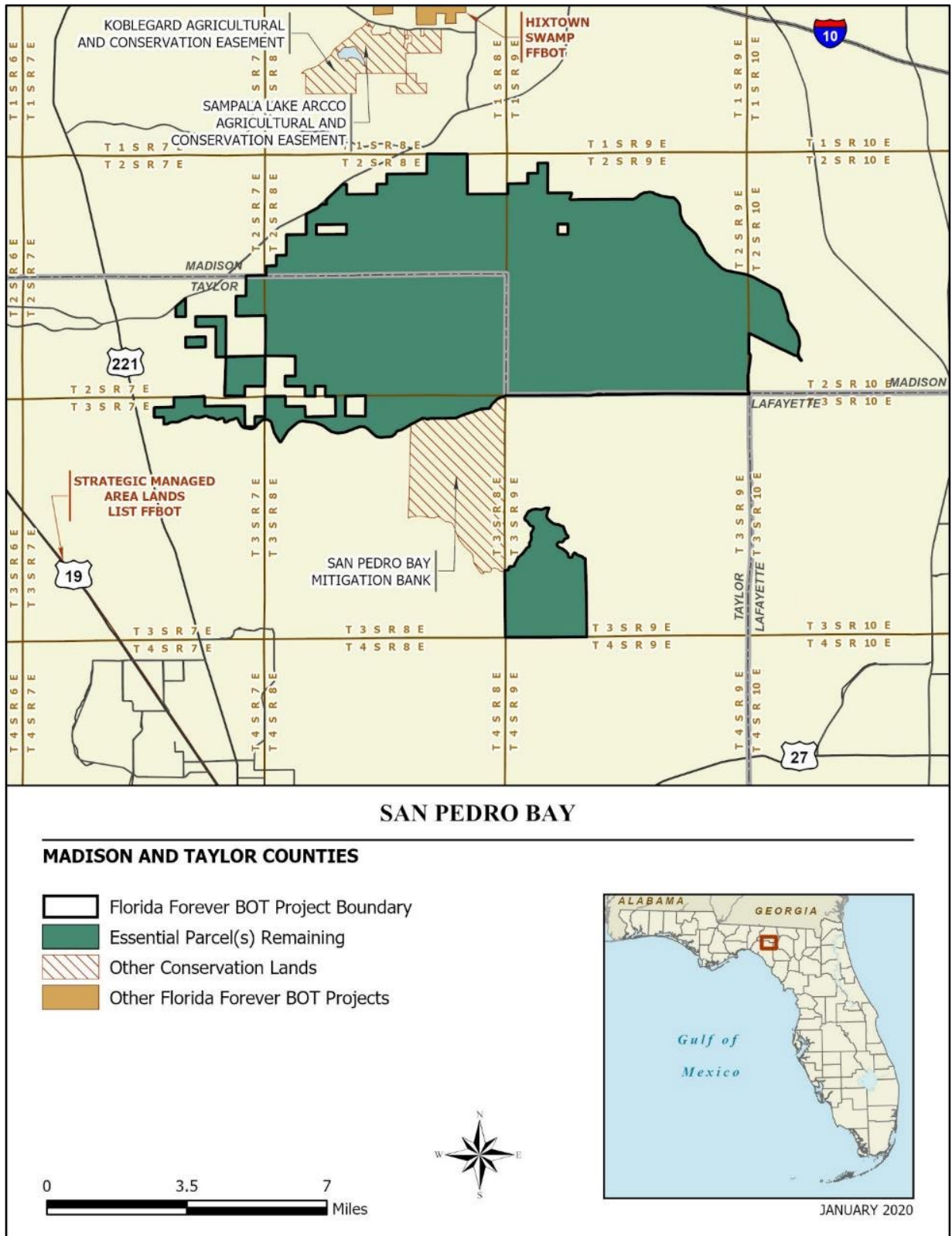


Management Cost Summary

<u>FWC and FFS</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	CARL
Resource Management	\$548,732	\$719,677
Administration	\$75,494	\$25,133
Support	\$149,080	\$31,566
Capital Improvements	\$2,187,189	\$316,190
Visitor Services/Recreation	\$3,756	\$141
Law Enforcement	\$31,351	\$31,351
TOTAL	\$2,995,601*	\$1,124,056

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





Map 1: FNAI, January 2020