

# St. Johns River Blueway

Climate Change Lands

Clay, St. Johns

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2002
<i>Project Acres</i>	26,481
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	9,288
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$3,112,640
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	17,194
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$552,412,883

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The St. Johns River Blueway project will preserve the last remaining undeveloped shoreline of the St. Johns River and several of its tributaries. The project also contains multiple recorded archaeological and historical resources.

## General Description

The St. Johns River Blueway runs along the eastern shore of the St. Johns River between Green Cove Springs and Palatka and bounds the Watson Island State Forest on the west bank of the St. Johns River. It includes considerable forested wetlands by the river and around six tributary creeks, plus mesic flatwoods, freshwater marsh, and a portion of disturbed uplands.

## FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
<i>Canby's wild indigo</i>	G3T1/S1
<i>Curtiss' loosestrife</i>	G1/S2
Creek siltsnail	G2/S2
<i>Thorne's beaksedge</i>	G3/S1S2
<i>Bartram's ixia</i>	G2G3/S2S3
Bachman's sparrow	G3/S3
Bald eagle	G5/S3
Osprey	G5/S3S4
Little blue heron	G5/S4

## Public Use

Both fee and less-than-fee acquisition approaches are recommended in the proposal. The resource-based recreation potential for the project is considered low to moderate, depending on what title rights and uplands can be obtained.

The project area is predominantly wetland or floodplain adjacent to the St. Johns River and its tributary creeks. These public waterways have boating and canoeing opportunities. Upland sites along the waterways could provide public access for the boating, opportunities for environmental education, wildlife viewing, hiking, bicycling, and camping or picnicking.

## Acquisition Planning

### **2002**

On December 5, 2002, ARC added the St. Johns River Blueway project to Group A of the Florida Forever 2003 Priority list. This fee-simple and less-than-fee acquisition, sponsored by St. Johns County, consisted of approximately 27,997 acres and 290 landowners. Six entities own more than 15,000 of the acres in the project: Rayonier, Meldrim, SJ Land Associates LLC, Klaerich, Ringhaver, and Plum Creek Timberlands LP.

### **2005**

On June 16, 2005, the BOT approved buying 231.8 acres (Warner). The BOT also acquired 736 acres (Lambert) in August 2005.

### **2010**

On June 11, 2010, the ARC placed this project in the Climate Change Lands category.

### **2011**

On December 9, 2011, the ARC recommended a 1,656-acre reduction to the project, removing residential development, commercial buildings or infrastructure from the boundary.

### **2016**

On August 16, 2016, the 5,237-acre Meldrim ownership was acquired as a perpetual conservation easement at a cost of \$5,991,803.

### **2020**

On December 11, 2020, the ARC approved an addition of 112-acres in Clay County to the project boundary.

## Coordination

Portions of the project may be acquired in partnership with St. Johns County. The SJRWMD is also interested in the acquisition of the project.

## Management Policy Statement

FFS proposes managing the project under multiple use management for the state forest system. Management would be designed to accomplish the goals and measures for this project. These goals and measures are referenced later in this prospectus. The primary land management goal for FFS is to



restore, maintain and protect in perpetuity all native ecosystems; to integrate compatible human use; and to ensure long-term viability of populations and species considered rare. This ecosystem approach will guide FFS's management activities on this project.

### Manager(s)

FFS has proposed managing part of the site as an addition to Watson Island State Forest, and the remainder of the site as a new state forest. Bunnell District personnel will manage the site and coordinate public access and use.

### Management Prospectus

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

The project's location, size, and diversity make it desirable for use and management as a state forest. State Forest designation requires that certain criteria be met, such as public access and acreage available for many types of recreational activities. Designation as a state forest is contingent upon acquiring property rights which are consistent with these criteria.

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

Much of the project's upland areas have been disturbed and will require various levels of restoration. Natural communities that have been converted to pine plantation will require removal of off-site species and reforestation with native species. Protecting and restoring wetland communities will be a priority for FFS. Restoration efforts will concentrate on removing and filling ditches and corrections of other hydrological alterations. Public use will be limited to activities that are compatible with any sensitive resources.

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

Once the project area is acquired and assigned to FFS, public access will be provided for low intensity outdoor recreation activities. Initial and intermediate management efforts will concentrate on resource inventory, restoring and reforesting areas where harvesting has occurred, hydrologic restoration, as well as site security, public and fire management access. Inventories of the site's natural resources, threatened and endangered flora and fauna, will be conducted to provide a basis for formulation of a management plan.

#### **Revenue-generating potential**

Timber sales will be conducted as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions. These sales will primarily take place in pine stands and will provide a variable source of revenue dependent upon a variety of factors. Due to the existing condition of the timber resource on the property, revenue generating potential of this project is expected to be low- medium. It is anticipated that management funding will come from the CARL trust fund.



**Cooperators in management activities**

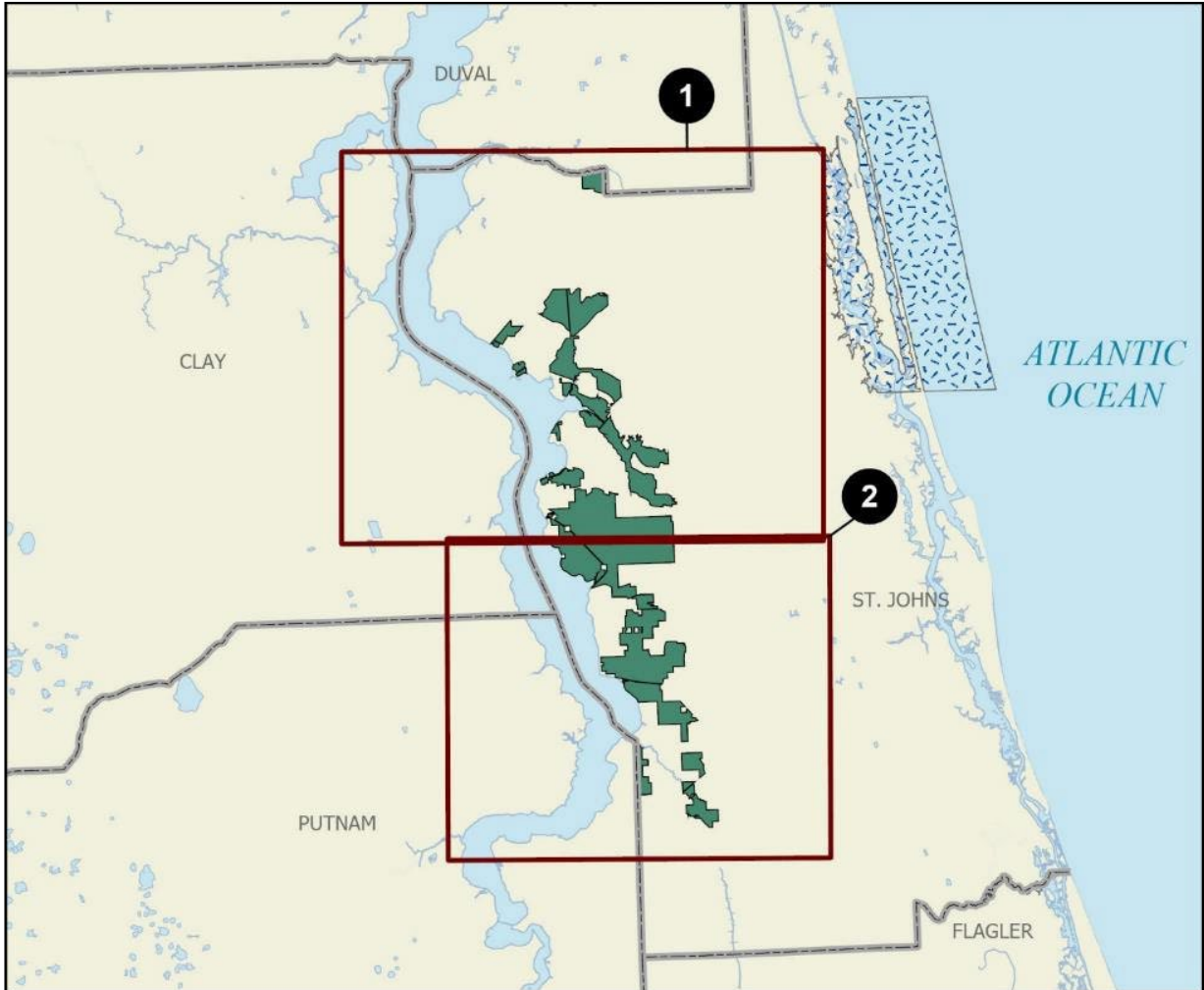
FFS will cooperate with and seek the assistance of other state agencies, local government entities and interested parties as appropriate.

Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	LATF	not provided
Salary (X FTE)	\$173,346	not provided
Expense	\$125,000	not provided
OCO	\$361,000	not provided
TOTAL	\$659,346	not provided

*Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted*





**ST. JOHNS RIVER BLUEWAY: OVERVIEW**

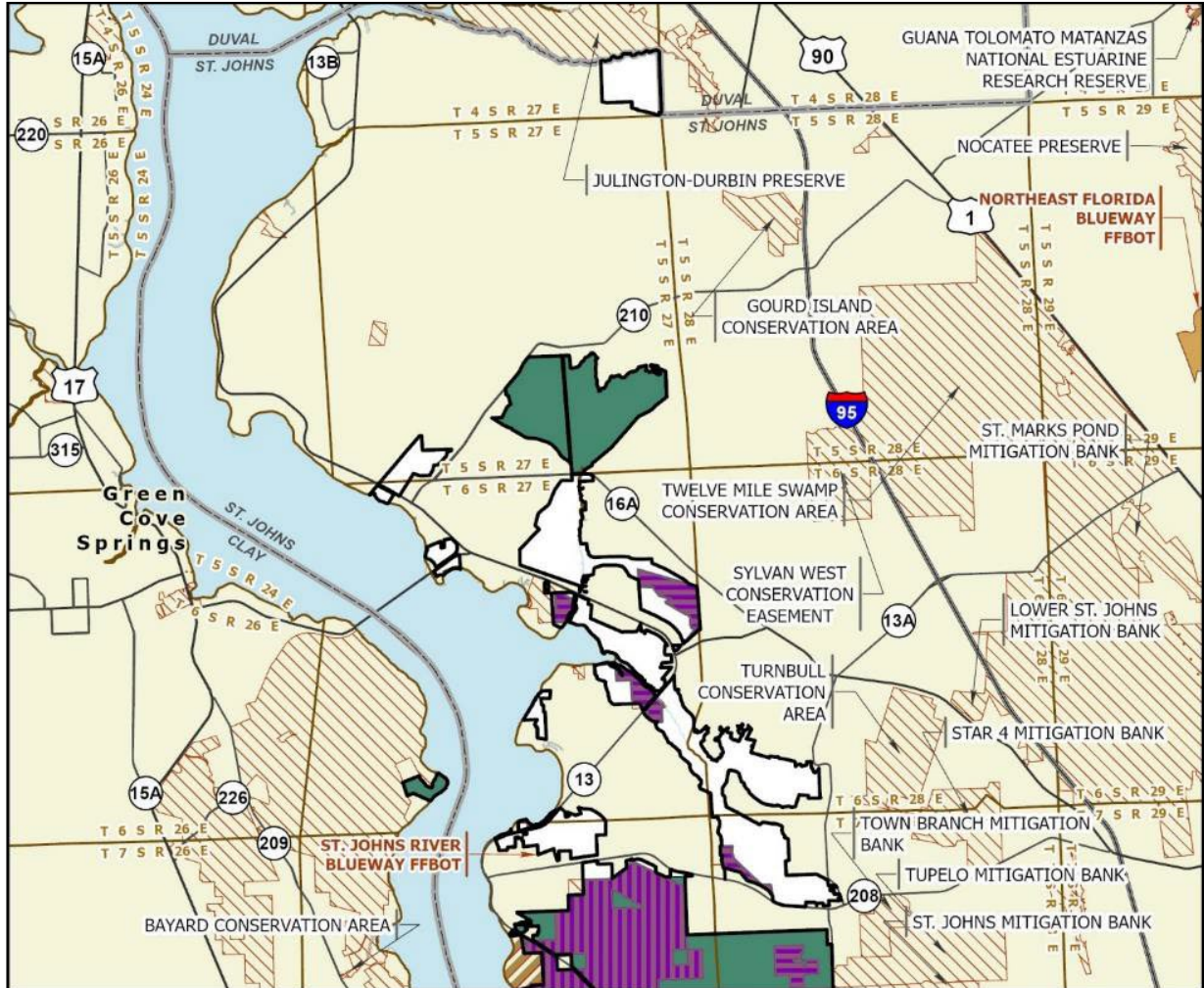
**ST. JOHNS COUNTY**



JANUARY 2020

Map 1: FNAI, January 2020





**ST. JOHNS RIVER BLUEWAY: MAP 1**

**ST. JOHNS COUNTY**

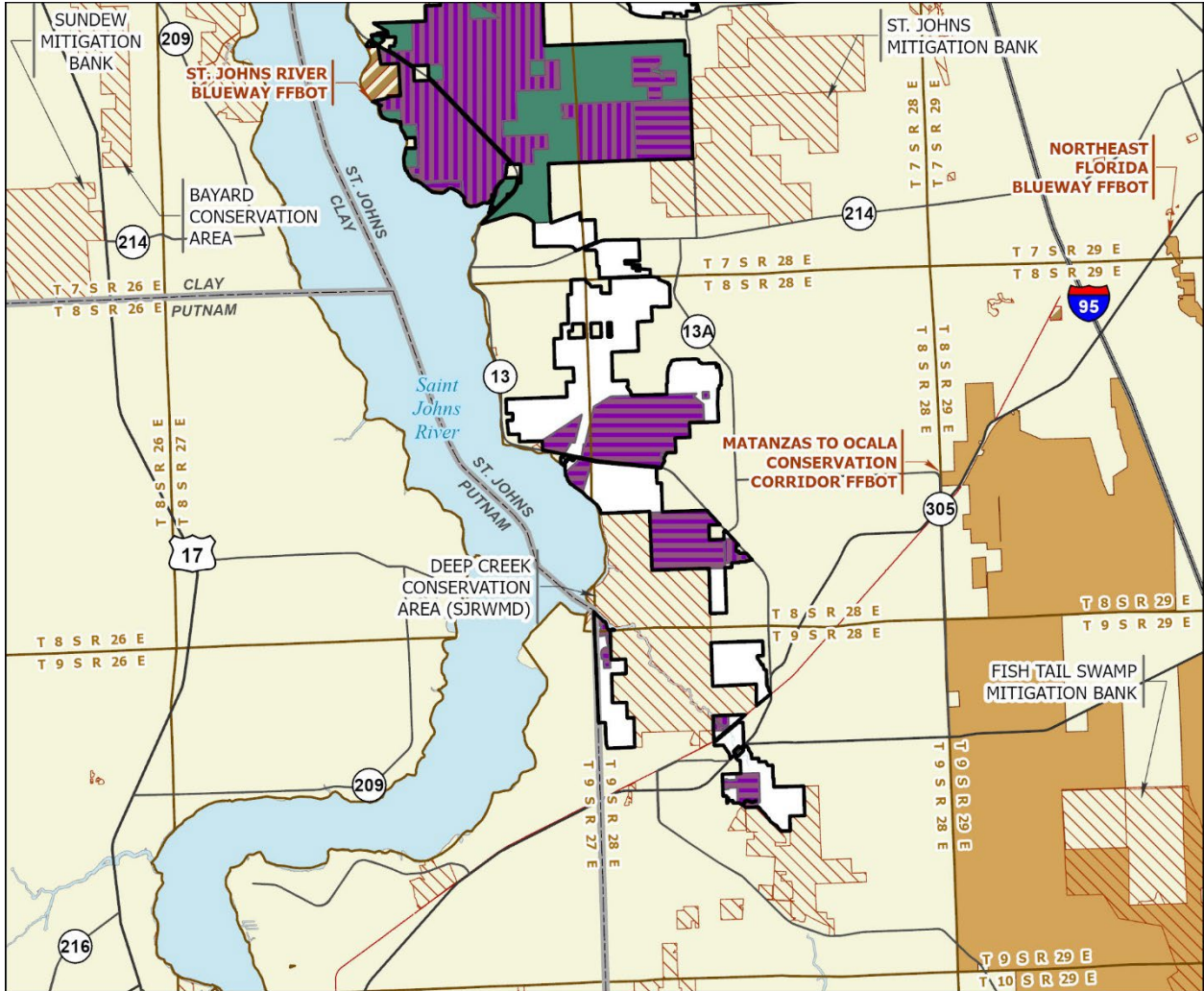
-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Acquired for Conservation (Fee Simple)
-  Acquired for Conservation (Less-Than-Fee)
-  Essential Parcel(s) Remaining
-  State Owned Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects
-  State Aquatic Preserve



JANUARY 2021

Map 2: FNAI, January 2021





**ST. JOHNS RIVER BLUEWAY: MAP 2**

**ST. JOHNS COUNTY**

-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Acquired for Conservation (Fee Simple)
-  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 3: FNAI, February 2022

