

Suwannee County Preservation

Less-Than-Fee

Suwannee

| | |
|---|-------------|
| <i>Year Added to Priority List</i> | 2010 |
| <i>Project Acres</i> | 1,254 |
| <i>Acquired Acres</i> | 0 |
| <i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i> | \$0 |
| <i>Remaining Project Acres</i> | 1,254 |
| <i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i> | \$5,107,604 |

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Suwannee County Preservation project will protect the water quality of the Suwannee River drainage area that harbors a number of rare plant and animal species, provide continued protection of Rocky Creek, sustain wildlife in the area, and provide long-term benefits to imperiled species such as the Florida black bear.

The Suwannee County Preservation project will protect significant strategic habitat conservation areas, preserve floodplains in the Rocky Creek and Suwannee River areas, and of support the quality and quantity of surface waters of the state.

General Description

Located in northeastern Suwannee County, just east of Live Oak and north of the Houston community, the Suwannee County Preservation project is a range of parcels in two primary locations—one parcel on the Suwannee River, and a cluster of parcels east of Live Oak, on both sides of Interstate 10. All are considered essential parcels. Rocky Creek, a perennial stream, crosses two of the largest parcels in the larger tract, then flows north for just over three miles before its confluence with the Suwannee River. The last stretch of Rocky Creek crosses through the SRWMD's Rocky Creek tract, which adjoins the Suwannee River.

A significant population of black bears exists approximately 20 miles east of the area within the Osceola National Forest. The Suwannee River, just north of the Rocky Creek Tract, is a known corridor for the black bear. In addition, black bears have been observed just a few miles south of the area near the town of Wellborn.

The Eastern Tracts consist principally of disturbed uplands and more naturally vegetated bottomland along the Rocky Creek system, which flows northward through the property on its way to the Suwannee River. Most of the better-drained uplands have been converted to pine plantation or have been timbered.

The 139-acre River Tract on Suwannee River is undeveloped, other than a decrepit shed, a cement boat ramp covered with sediment at the lower end, and the existence of electrical power and a well. Rising abruptly from the river’s eastern bank is a natural levee, behind which is a broader band of bottomland forest supporting a variety of hardwoods. Inland of this, the upland portion of the tract, about 99 acres, is mostly pine plantation.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

| FNAI Elements | Score |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Gopher tortoise | G3/S3 |

Public Use

The Suwannee County Preservation project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access. The landowners indicated that they could be willing to sell their property in fee simple. If acquired in fee-simple, the eastern tract bisected by Interstate 10 could provide many trail opportunities for hiking, off road biking, horseback riding, nature/interpretive and off-highway vehicle riding. The project could also provide picnicking, primitive camping, hunting and geocaching. The river tract located on the Suwannee River could provide, in addition to the activities listed above, freshwater boating, fishing, canoeing and kayaking.

Acquisition Planning

2010

On June 11, 2010, the ARC added the Suwannee County Preservation project to the Florida Forever priority list in the Less-Than-Fee category. In 2010, the project had an estimated tax assessed value of \$2,995,178.

Coordination

No acquisition partners identified.

Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Suwannee County Preservation 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 Suwannee County Preservation 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.



Qualifications for state designation

Acquiring the Suwannee County Preservation project fulfills the Florida Forever goals of acquiring conservation land with means other than fee-simple purchase, of acquiring significant strategic habitat conservation areas, of protecting floodplains in the Rocky Creek and in the Suwannee River areas and protecting the surface waters of the state.

Conditions affecting intensity of management

Disturbed acreage includes pine plantation and associated facilities, power line rights-of-way, roads, and ruderal sites, some of which now support successional hardwood forest and row crops. Despite the high level of disturbance to uplands throughout the site, no exotic species listed by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council were observed. Restoration of natural habitat would be extensive and prolonged due to the current land use. The small size and proximity of the tract to I-10 excludes the use of prescribed fire as a habitat management tool. Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) notes that the upland pine (sandhill or upland pine forest) natural community (and perhaps some mesic flatwoods) that usually occupy most of the higher, well drained uplands on site has been all but eliminated by silviculture and fire exclusion.

Restoration to historic conditions would require removal of off-site pine, replanting with longleaf pine, and attempting to restore native groundcover and shrubby vegetation by seeding or planting. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) notes that substantial and prolonged habitat restoration would be necessary for the area to become beneficial to a more diverse variety of wildlife.

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

This is not applicable to a Conservation Easement.

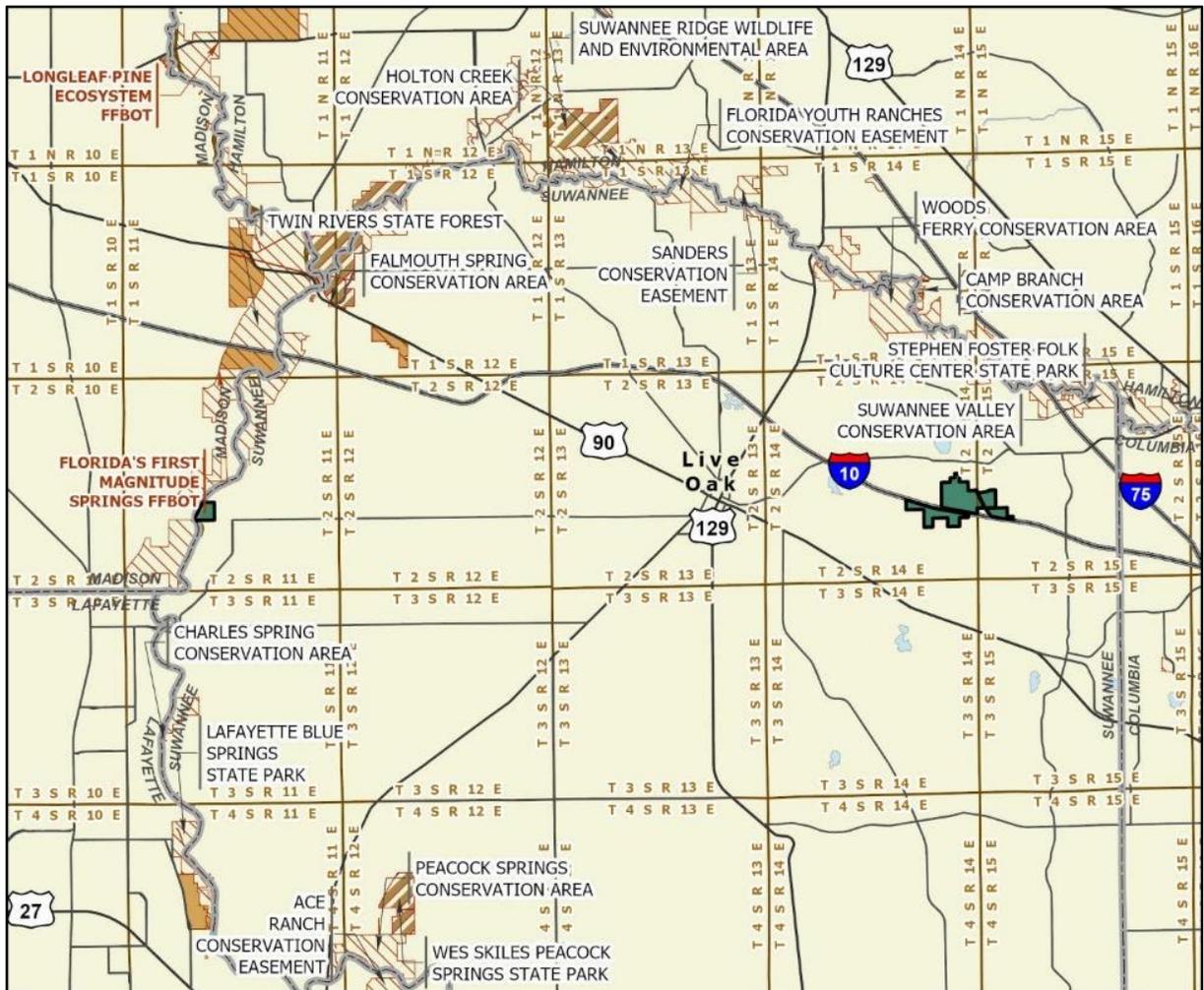
Revenue-generating potential

None available under the conservation easement.

Cooperators in management activities

The landowner and the Division of State Lands' Office of Environmental Services (OES).





SUWANNEE COUNTY PRESERVATION

SUWANNEE COUNTY

-  Florida Forever BOT Project Boundary
-  Essential Parcel(s) Remaining
-  State Owned Conservation Lands
-  Other Conservation Lands
-  Other Florida Forever BOT Projects



JANUARY 2020



Map 1: FNAI, January 2020