

Wacissa/Aucilla River Sinks

Critical Natural Lands

Jefferson, Taylor

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	1985
<i>Project Acres</i>	33,081
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	18,173
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$5,886,137
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	14,908
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$21,527,878

Purpose for State Acquisition

The tea-colored Aucilla River and the crystal-clear Wacissa River flow through rich swamps and marshes on their way to meet each other before emptying into the Gulf. The Wacissa/Aucilla River Sinks project will protect the Wacissa River and the lower course of the Aucilla River, thereby maintaining the water quality of these streams, protecting aquatic caves and sinkholes, preserving important archaeological sites, and giving the public the opportunity to enjoy these rivers in their natural state for years to come. This project may also help complete the Florida National Scenic Trail, a statewide non-motorized trail that crosses a number of Florida Forever project sites.

General Description

This project is comprised of parcels needed to protect the headwaters of the Wacissa River to the north and provide a link to St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge to the south. It encompasses much of the Aucilla River, a blackwater stream, and the Wacissa River, a spring-fed stream. Both are in good condition and are popular canoe trails. Although the surrounding areas are part of a commercial timber operation, the natural resources at the site remain in good condition. The ten rare natural communities in the project create a diverse natural area with an abundance of water birds, and rare invertebrates and turtles. The project boasts several unique geological features including the Aucilla River Sinks, where the Aucilla River alternately flows through subterranean passageways and reappears at the surface.

Numerous Native American historical sites are known from both rivers. Twelve-thousand-year-old mastodon tusks from the Aucilla are the oldest evidence of hunting in North America. The project is threatened by riverfront development.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Frosted flatwoods salamander	G2/S1
Eastern indigo snake	G3/S2?
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Swallow-tailed kite	G5/S2
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Barbour's map turtle	G2/S2
Florida olive hairstreak	G5T2/S2
<i>Florida willow</i>	G2G3/S2S3
<i>Chapman's sedge</i>	G3/S3
<i>corkwood</i>	G3/S3
Eastern diamondback rattlesnake	G3/S3
Alligator snapping turtle	G3/S3

Public Use

This project is designated for use as a WMA, providing opportunities for canoeing, swimming, fishing, hunting and nature appreciation.

Acquisition Planning

1985

In 1985, the LASC added the original Wacissa/Aucilla River Sinks project to the CARL Priority list. This fee-simple acquisition, sponsored by FNAI, consisted of approximately 13,668 acres, and three major ownerships (the largest with 13,000 acres).

1986

On March 21, 1986, the LASC approved the project design for 20,258 acres that includes the original proposal and additional acreage.

1989

On December 1, 1989, the LAAC approved a fee-simple, 320-acre addition to the project boundary. Sponsored by DHR, the addition consisted of one landowner, St. Joe Land and Development Co. The landowner already has property in the project boundary. This addition will bring into State ownership and management the remainder of the archaeologically significant feature known as Calico Hill.

On April 7, 1992, the LAAC approved a fee-simple, 4,500-acre addition to the project boundary. The addition consisted of two ownerships, St. Joe Paper and Proctor and Gamble Cellulose. This addition will provide continuity between St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, the Big Bend WMA, and the project. St. Joe Paper is already in the project boundary.

1999

On March 26, 1999, the LAMAC approved a fee-simple, 11,920-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by TNC, consisted of one landowner, the St. Joe Company. The landowner is already in the boundary. This addition would provide connectivity with the Aucilla Wildlife Management Area.



2000

In 2000, the ARC approved the transfer of approximately 20,036 acres to the St. Joe Timberland FF project. This acreage is portions of the original project owned by the St. Joe Company.

2001

On October 25, 2001, the ARC approved a fee-simple, 7,068-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by the FWC and consisted of one landowner, the Foley Land and Timber Company. This tract fills a critical gap in the regional landscape of protected conservation areas by filling the hole between Trustees ownership along the Wacissa River and District ownership along the Aucilla. These parcels were designated as essential.

Also, on October 25, 2001, the ARC approved a fee-simple, 117-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by DSL and consisted of seven small ownerships. This addition will protect Aucilla Spring and the other springs in the Wacissa springhead group as well as provide buffer areas for the associated spring run. These parcels were designated as essential.

2011

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

2012

On April 20, 2012, the 2,836-acre Flint Rock tract was transferred to the Wacissa/Aucilla River Sinks Florida Forever project from the St. Joe Timberland project. After this most recent boundary change in 2012, the project had a combined, historic, estimated tax assessed value of \$3,413,439.

Coordination

TNC, FWC, and SRWMD will be acquisition partners for this project.

Management Policy Statement

The primary goals of management of the Wacissa/Aucilla River Sinks project are to conserve, protect, manage, or restore important ecosystems, landscapes, and forests, in order to enhance or protect significant surface water, coastal, recreational, timber, fish or wildlife resources which local or state regulatory programs cannot adequately protect; to provide areas, including recreational trails, for natural-resource-based recreation; and to preserve significant archaeological or historical sites.

Manager(s)

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

Management Prospectus**Qualifications for state designation**

Much of the Wacissa/Aucilla River Sinks project is within the Aucilla WMA. This, together with the rivers' value as wildlife habitat, qualifies the project as a wildlife management area.



Conditions affecting intensity of management

The nature of these two river corridors and their attendant floodplains indicate a relatively low need for intense management. The unique beauty of the area, and the presence of numerous cultural sites indicate a need for intense protective measures and a need to focus on control of public access.

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

Most public-access points are already in place, including a county park at the head spring of the Wacissa. Therefore, immediate management control could be assumed by FWC. First-year activities would include posting the boundaries, establishing control at public-access points, and beginning the planning process. Long-term management (second year and following) would entail management of these lands as an integral part of the Big Bend/Aucilla WMA recreational complex.

Revenue-generating potential

Without new WMA fees charged for non-consumptive uses of this area, the revenue potential appears low, despite high recreation values. If a method for charging canoeists, nature enthusiasts, fishermen and hikers could be devised, the revenue potential would be moderate.

Cooperators in management activities

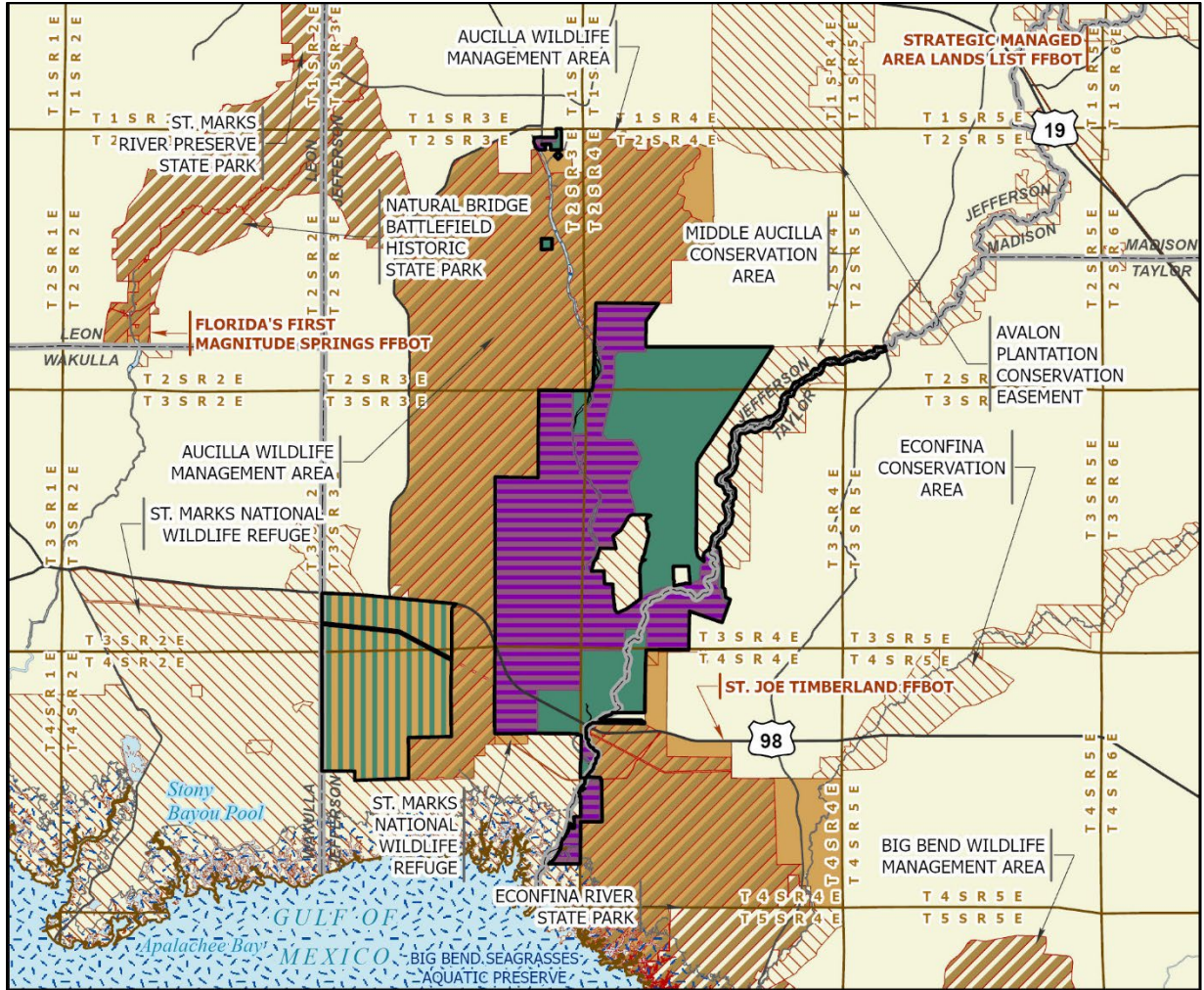
DHR and FFS are expected to cooperate in the management of this property. Jefferson County may also be involved since it manages a county park at the head spring.

Management Cost Summary

<u>FWC</u>	<u>1996/97</u>	<u>1997/98</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	CARL
Salary	\$0	\$11,133
OPS	\$0	\$0
Expense	\$126	\$2000
OCO	\$0	\$0
FCO	\$0	\$0
TOTAL	\$126	\$13,133

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted

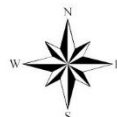
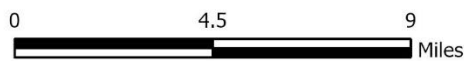




WACISSA/AUCILLA RIVER SINKS

JEFFERSON AND TAYLOR COUNTIES

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



FEBRUARY 2022

Map 1: FNAI, February 2022

