

Watermelon Pond

Partnerships & Regional Incentives

Alachua, Levy

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	1994
<i>Project Acres</i>	12,542
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	7,187
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$8,707,029
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	5,355
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$18,667,263

Purpose for State Acquisition

The Watermelon Pond project will conserve one of the best remaining landscapes of dry longleaf pine sandhills pocked with marshes and lakes. The project will conserve habitat critical for species such as fox squirrels, sandhill cranes, and scrub bay. The project will protect ground water supply and provide the public with resource-based recreation opportunities.

General Description

The project is important for its extensive tract of xeric uplands (sandhill and scrub natural communities) and seasonally interconnected wetlands of the Brooksville Ridge physiographic province. The complex of these uplands with their marshes and lakes is regionally significant to vertebrate fauna in an area of the state subject to extensive development pressures. No comparable complex is protected in north-central Florida. The project is also the major aquifer recharge area in Alachua County. No archaeological sites are known from the project. The uplands are threatened by subdivision for agriculture and ranchette developments.

FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
Striped newt	G2G3/S2
Eastern indigo snake	G3/S2?
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida mouse	G3/S3
Southeastern fox squirrel	G5T5/S3
Skelley's june beetle	G2/S2
<i>giant orchid</i>	G2G3/S2
Southern hognose snake	G2/S2S3
<i>incised groove-bur</i>	G3/S2
Gopher frog	G2G3/S3
<i>scrub stylisma</i>	G3/S3

Public Use

This project will be designated as a state forest with such public uses as hiking, fishing, horseback riding and camping.

Acquisition Planning

Phase I: (essential) Loncala (acquired) and other large sandhill and xeric tracts including Gladman, Burch, Matson, Hart, Barry, O'Steen and Outler. Phase II: Remaining tracts.

1998

On October 15, 1998, the LAAC designated the non-subdivided portion of section 36 and 11 other "corridor" parcels as essential.

2003

On February 7, 2003, the ARC added 250 acres in Alachua County to the project boundaries.

On December 5, 2003, the ARC moved this project to the Group B list.

2007

In April 2007, FWC acquired 1,288 acres, identified as Barry Ranch. Of these acres, 607 are within the Watermelon Pond Florida Forever project boundary.

2010

On August 13, 2010, the ARC approved a 3,161-acre reduction in the project boundary due to residential/commercial/infrastructure development.

2011

On December 9, 2011, this project was placed in the Partnerships and Regional Incentives category of Florida Forever projects.

Coordination

FWC and Alachua County are acquisition partners for this project. On April 11, 2012, Alachua County purchased 640 acres in an adjoining area, which will help buffer the project.



Management Policy Statement

The primary goals of management of the Watermelon Pond CARL project are to conserve and protect significant habitat for native species or endangered and threatened species; 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; and to provide areas, including recreational trails, for natural- resource-based recreation.

Manager(s)

FFS

Management Prospectus

Qualifications for state designation

The natural pine forests and the restorable pine plantations of the Watermelon Pond project make it desirable for management as a state forest.

Conditions affecting intensity of management

The areas of pine plantation and agricultural land in the project will require reforestation and restoration efforts beyond the level typically expected on a state forest. Consequently, management intensity and related management costs might be slightly higher than what would normally occur on a state forest.

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

Once the core area is acquired, FFS will provide public access for low-intensity, non-facilities- related outdoor recreation. Initial activities will include securing the site, providing public and fire management access, inventorying resources, and removing trash. FFS will provide access to the public while protecting sensitive resources. The project's natural resources and threatened and endangered plants and animals will be inventoried to provide the basis for a management plan.

Long-range plans for this project will generally be directed toward restoring disturbed areas to their original conditions, as far as possible, as well as protecting threatened and endangered species. Some of the pinelands have been degraded by timbering and require restoration.

An all-season burning program will use, whenever possible, existing roads, black lines, foam lines and natural breaks to contain fires. Timber management will mostly involve improvement thinning and regeneration harvests. Plantations will be thinned and, where appropriate, reforested with species found in natural ecosystems. Stands will not have a targeted rotation age. Infrastructure will primarily be in disturbed areas and will be the minimum required for management and public access. FFS will promote environmental education.



Revenue-generating potential

FFS will sell timber as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions. These sales will provide a variable source of revenue, but the revenue-generating potential for this project is expected to be low to moderate.

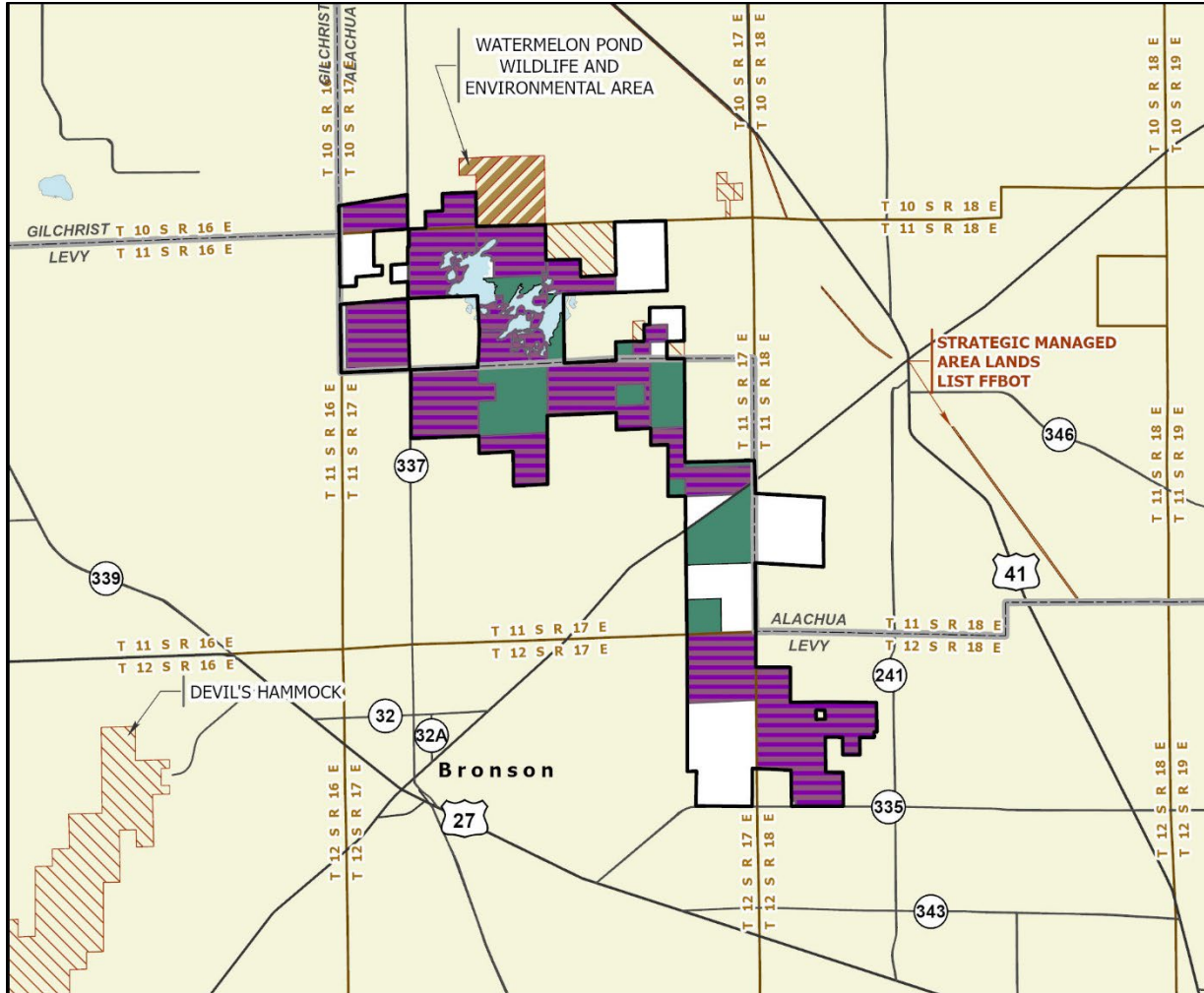
Cooperators in management activities

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

Management Cost Summary

<u>FFS</u>	<u>Startup</u>	<u>Recurring</u>
Source of Funds	CARL	CARL
Salary	\$80,530	\$80,530
OPS	\$0	\$0
Expense	\$30,000	\$20,000
OCO	\$112,500	\$6,000
FCO	\$0	\$0
TOTAL	\$223,030	\$106,530

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted



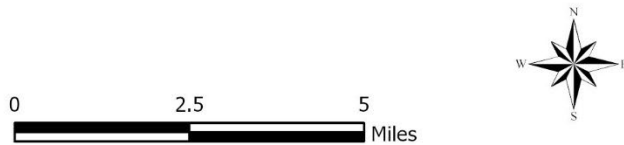
WATERMELON POND

ALACHUA AND LEVY COUNTIES

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



FEBRUARY 2022



Map 1: FNAI, February 2022