

# Withlacoochee River Corridor

Less-Than-Fee

Citrus, Hernando

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	2020
<i>Project Acres</i>	3,286
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	0
<i>Cost of Acquired Acres</i>	\$0
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	3,286
<i>2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$8,456,772

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Withlacoochee River Corridor project will create a conservation corridor along the Withlacoochee River between existing state-owned conservation lands. The project will conserve unique habitat for species such as the gopher tortoise, bald eagles, fox squirrels, and rare ferns. Preservation of sandy upland oak hammocks and lowland cypress swamps and willow marshes will contribute to the connectivity of habitats and maintain natural functions of the land. The project will support state water quality and quantity by protecting the Withlacoochee River floodplain and associated wetlands.

## General Description

The Withlacoochee River Corridor is in Citrus and Hernando counties and owned by Triple S. Ranch LLC and Mr. Scott Adams, Trustees of the Richard J. Miller Revocable Trust, Terrence Cronin, Jr., JEM Investments Ltd., Cosmic Mortgage Corporation, and Ray W. Stevenson. The project is characterized by dry and sandy uplands with pine forest and oak hammocks as well as lowlands consisting of mature cypress swamps, willow marshes, and basin swamps within the floodplain of the Withlacoochee River. This district is referred to as the Lime Sink Region, attributable to its low rolling limestone plains overlain by thin sands supporting the natural maze of swamps, marshes, flatwoods, and lakes.

The project's most outstanding natural features are the limestone caves and canyons often referred to as "fern grottos." There are several terrestrial cave entrances as well as a portion of the Pineola Fern Grotto Cave Complex. Rich upland hardwood forests are found in the immediate vicinity of these unique karst features and together they provide valuable habitat for rare flora and fauna, including copious numbers of rare ferns and two rare species of bat. The sandy upland area provides habitat for large population of gopher tortoises and birds of prey such as ospreys, red-tailed hawks, and bald eagles. The striking assemblage of hardwood forests, sandy uplands, and rare geological formations has been the subject of interest for botanists for over 100 years. Significant cultural sites from Florida's prehistoric and historic periods, are documented throughout the project.

### FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Eastern indigo snake	G3/S2?
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
<i>modest spleenwort</i>	G1/S1
<i>Curtiss' spleenwort</i>	GNA/S1
<i>creeping maiden fern</i>	G5/S2
<i>plume polypody</i>	G5/S2
<i>widespread polypody</i>	G5/S2
<i>brittle maidenhair fern</i>	G5/S3
Southeastern myotis	G4/S3
Snowy egret	G5/S3
Osprey	G5/S3S4
Little blue heron	G5/S4

#### Public Use

The Withlacoochee River Corridor project is proposed for less-than-fee acquisition and does not provide for public access. However, the project will protect the scenic resources of the Withlacoochee State Trail located on the westernmost boundary of the project. The project will provide additional public benefit through imperiled species protection, protection of unique geological formations, rural landscape conservation, and a wildlife corridor.

#### Acquisition Planning

##### **2020**

In June 2020, the ARC added the 1,714-acre Withlacoochee River Corridor project to the Less-Than-Fee category of the 2021 Florida Forever Priority List. This less-than-fee project was proposed by Conservation Florida and consists of multiple parcels among two ownerships.

In October 2020 the ARC the 1,645-acre Withlacoochee River Addition was approved by the ARC and added to the project. It was comprised of an additional five ownerships containing acres along the west shoreline of the Withlacoochee River and was the result of feedback received during an assessment team site visit in February 2020 to the Withlacoochee River Corridor project.

#### Management Policy Statement

As a less-than-fee acquisition, the Withlacoochee River Corridor project would be managed for conservation purposes by the landowner as outlined in the conservation easement.

#### Manager(s)

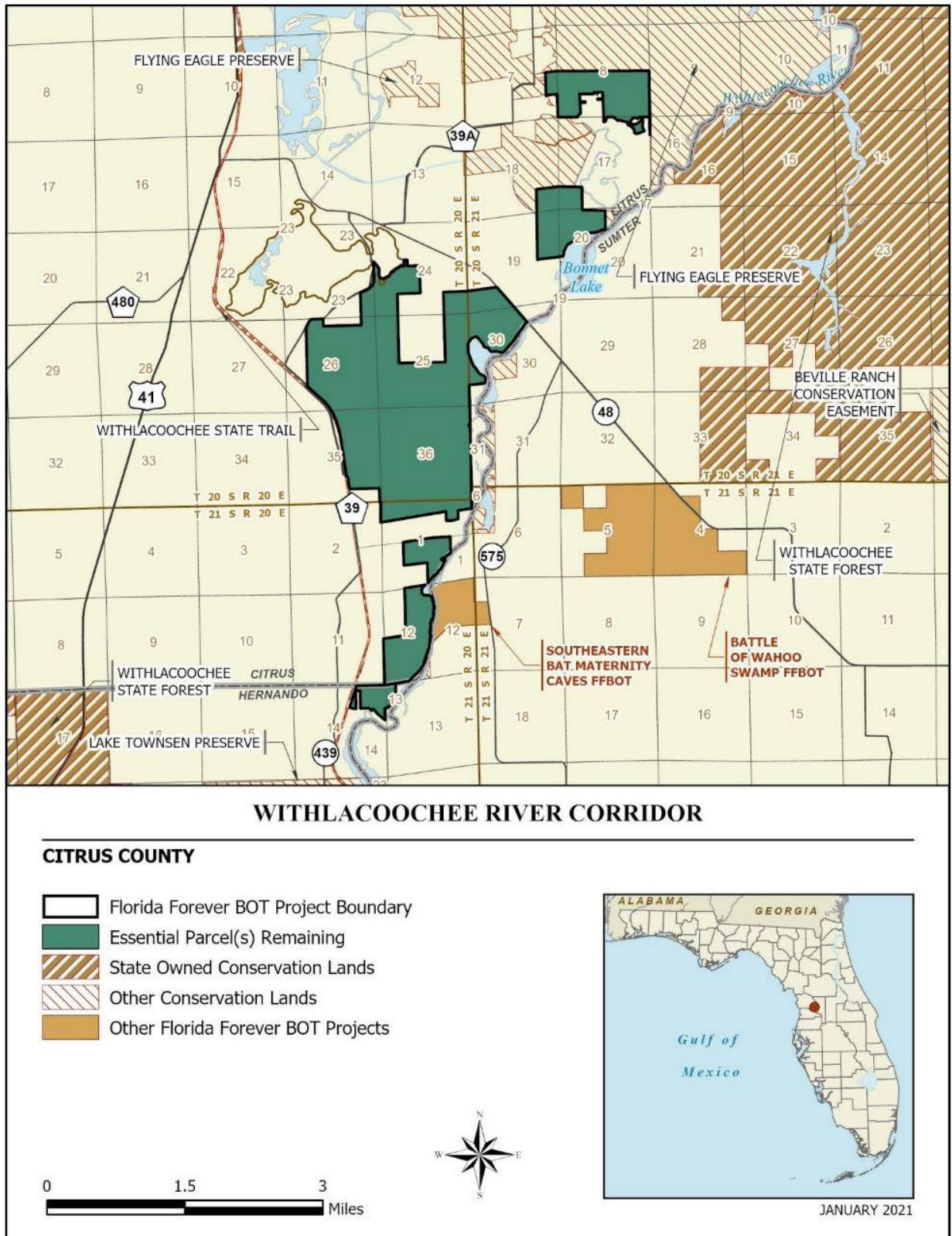
If acquired as less-than-fee, management responsibility of the Withlacoochee River Corridor would remain with the landowner. Periodic monitoring of the site's management to confirm continued compliance with the conditions of the conservation easement would be coordinated by OES.



### Management Prospectus

The OES will periodically monitor the conservation easement, while the primary management will be conducted by the property owner.





Map 1: FNAI, January 2021