

# Bombing Range Ridge

Critical Natural Lands

Highlands, Osceola, and Polk Counties

<i>Year Added to Priority List</i>	1998
<i>Project Acres</i>	47,272
<i>Acquired Acres</i>	18,894
<i>Remaining Project Acres</i>	28,379
<i>2024 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres</i>	\$61,843,337

## Purpose for State Acquisition

The Bombing Range Ridge project will protect flatwoods, marshes, swamps, hammocks and scrub ridge that provide critical habitat for rare species including Florida scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) and Florida grasshopper sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum floridanus*). The project would contribute to the protection of significant water resources including the Kissimmee River, Lake Rosalie, Tiger Lake and Lake Walk-in-Water and protect the ruins of Sumica, a small turpentine and timber community built and then abandoned in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The project will connect Avon Park Air Force Range with adjacent state conservation lands and provide areas for outdoor resource-based recreation.

## General Description

The project is in southeastern Polk County, 15 miles east of Lake Wales and adjacent to the west side of Lake Kissimmee. The project's namesake, the Bombing Range Ridge, is a prominent relic sand bar that separates the Kissimmee River and Arbuckle Creek. The project includes most of the ridge's unprotected portions that are not within APAFR. Scrubby flatwoods and scrub occur on higher elevations of the project. Mesic flatwoods within the project area are interspersed with rarer community types like seepage slope and wet prairie. East of Tiger Lake, the project contains portions of scrub ridge, mesic flatwoods, depression marshes, large basin marsh systems and a broad floodplain marsh associated with Lake Kissimmee. Both areas are controlled by a hunt club and numerous modular homes, parked recreational vehicles and other similar type structures are scattered throughout.

Areas of the project south of Lake Rosalie and northeast of Lake Weohyakapka contain sections of Weohyakapka Creek (a blackwater stream) and associated wetlands, including an extensive floodplain swamp and hydric hammock. Uplands in this portion of the project support mesic flatwoods, scrubby flatwoods and dry prairie. The large tract that sits northeast of Lake Weohyakapka has been well-managed and is relatively undisturbed. This is the site of an old railroad grade and the remains of the Sumica settlement.





FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<b><u>FNAI Elements</u></b>	<b><u>Score</u></b>
Florida scrub-jay	G1G2/S1S2
Eastern indigo snake	G3/S2?
Red-cockaded woodpecker	G3/S2
Snail kite	G4G5/S2
Swallow-tailed kite	G5/S2
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
<i>scrub pigeon-wing</i>	G2G3/S2S3
<i>Florida hartwrightia</i>	G2G3/S2S3
Berry's skipper	G2/S3
<i>nodding pinweed</i>	G3/S3
Florida burrowing owl	G4T3/S3

**Public Use**

The area can support a range of recreation opportunities from hiking and primitive camping to canoeing, fishing and hunting.

**Acquisition Planning**

**1997**

The Bombing Range Ridge project was added to the Land Acquisition and Management Advisory Council Conservation and Recreational Lands (CARL) Priority List at their December meeting. This fee-simple acquisition, sponsored by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), consisted of approximately 39,073 acres, multiple owners and a taxable value of \$15,238,510.

The project was divided into Priority I and Priority II areas. The essential parcels are Priority I, especially Wheeler, Avatar, Winter Haven Christian School, Lightsey, River Ranch Landowners Association members, Polk County and the Patrick Nee ownerships.

On August 19, 1997, the Polk County Board of County Commissioners signed a resolution that gave high priority to this project and supported the acquisition through CARL.

**1998**

In 1998, Polk County and the South Florida Water Management District acquired the Sumica tract. The tract totaled approximately 4,167 acres.

**2001**

On May 17, 2001, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) approved a fee-simple 1,521-acre addition to the project boundary. It was sponsored by the owner, Meredith Scott MD Trust, and had a taxable value of \$3,256,856.

**2002**

In 2002, ARC removed an estimated 1,000 acres at various locations in the project, which were owned by approximately 400 landowners who no longer wanted to be included in the project.





**2003**

On August 15, 2003, ARC approved a less-than-fee 1,691-acre addition (Brahma Island tract) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by Saunders Realty, consisted of one owner, Cary and Layne Lightsey, and had a taxable value of \$176,180.

**2005**

In April 2005, the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund acquired the Brahma Island Tract (approximately 1,063.40 acres) through a conservation easement.

**2006**

On October 13, 2006, ARC approved a fee-simple, 3,189-acre addition (Goolsby Ranch) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), had one landowner (the Goolsby family), and had a taxable value of \$415,291. If acquired, the site will be managed by the Florida Forest Service (FFS). In view of the configuration of the Bombing Range Ridge project, this site is not essential to project completion or manageability.

**2007**

On April 17, 2007, the project boundary was modified to exclude a <0.5-acre parcel at the request of the landowner.

**2011**

On August 15, 2011, the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Division of State Lands (DSL) purchased a 2,674-acre easement in the project from TNC.

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

**2013**

On April 19, 2013, ARC approved the removal of 14 parcels in five sites totaling 63.98 acres.

**2015**

On August 19, 2015, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) established the 85.87-acre Idols Aside conservation easement, of which 13.69 acres are within the project boundary.

**2016**

On October 6, 2016, USFWS purchased a 201.5-acre conservation easement.

**2018**

On November 30, 2018, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services closed on a 4,468-acre easement owned by the Goolsby Ranch.

**2020**

On February 14, 2020, ARC approved a 0.94-acre reduction to the project boundary in Polk County.

On June 12, 2020, ARC approved a 2.53-acre reduction to the project boundary in Polk County.

**2021**

On February 12, 2021, ARC approved a 1.27-acre reduction to the project boundary in Polk County.





## **2022**

On February 11, 2022, ARC approved a reduction of 16.38 acres (13 parcels within the River Ranch Subdivision) in Polk County from the project boundary.

### **Coordination**

About two percent of the parcels within the project are either county-owned or county tax certificates. Polk county has expressed interest in giving the land to the state and letting the state manage it, selling the parcels to the state, or exchanging the parcels with the state for other parcels outside the proposal. TNC is an intermediary on this project.

### **Management Policy Statement**

The primary goals of management of the Bombing Range Ridge project are: to conserve and protect critical habitat for rare, endangered and threatened species; to conserve, protect, manage or restore important ecosystems, landscapes and forests in order to enhance or protect significant surface water, 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)**

FFS and FWC will manage all but 540 acres in the north portion of the project adjacent to Rosalie Creek; this portion will be managed by DEP's Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP).

### **Management Prospectus**

#### **Qualifications for State Designation**

The Bombing Range Ridge project is a vast area of quality flatwoods together with marshes, swamps, hammocks and scrub. The project contains valuable habitat for numerous listed bird species.

Approximately 400 acres of the project on the shore of Tiger Lake is adjacent to Lake Kissimmee State Park. The area contains Rosalie Creek, a drainage joining Lake Rosalie with Tiger Lake, a portion of which the creek is already a part of the park. The project's size and diversity make it desirable for a state forest. Management by FFS as a state forest depends on the state obtaining legal public access to the site and acquiring fee simple title to the core parcels.

#### **Conditions Affecting Intensity of Management**

The project is mostly composed of small lots with several thousand owners. Numerous properties contain structures and accessory structures. This will complicate fire management and exotic species control on all but the largest, most contiguous properties and create numerous challenges with encroachment, illegal dumping and unauthorized trespass.

#### **Management Implementation, Public Access, Site Security and Protection of Infrastructure**

Upon fee-simple acquisition, DRP proposes to provide public access for low-intensity, non-facility-related outdoor recreation activities. FFS proposes to manage the site as a unit of the Lake Wales Ridge State Forest, and management activities will be done with district and state forest personnel. Initial or





intermediate efforts of FFS will concentrate on site security, public and fire management access, resource inventory and removing trash. The public will have appropriate access, but sensitive resources will also be affordably protected. Vehicle use by the public will be confined to designated roads and unnecessary access points will be closed. An inventory of the site’s natural resources and imperiled species will be conducted to provide the basis for formulation of a management plan. Emphasis will be given to protection of Rosalie Creek and its surrounding ecological system. Resource management activities in the first year of each fee title acquisition will concentrate on site security, including posting boundaries and developing a resource inventory in conjunction with the development of a comprehensive management plan. Long-term management by DRP would include resource-based recreation and associated facilities compatible with the resources.

**Revenue-generating Potential**

Timber sales will be conducted as needed to improve or maintain desirable ecosystem conditions. These sales will primarily take place in upland pine stands and will provide a variable source of revenue dependent upon a variety of factors. Revenue generating potential of this project is expected to be moderate.

**Cooperators in Management Activities**

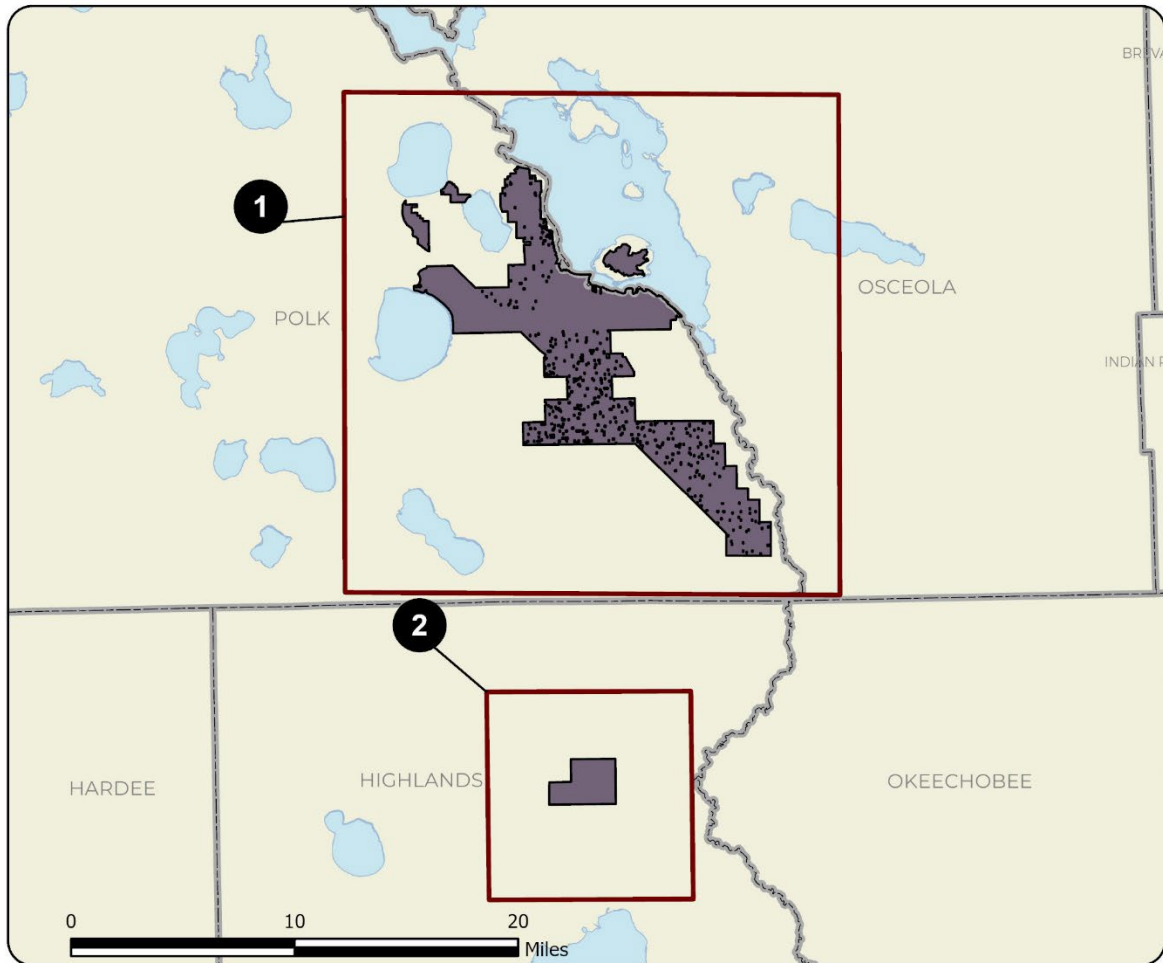
FFS and DRP will cooperate with local governments, state agencies and the Southwest Florida Water Management District to further resource management, recreational and educational opportunities, and the use of the lands for state park purposes.

Management Cost Summary

FFS	Startup	Recurring
Source	LATF	
Salary	\$86,412	not provided
OPS	\$0	not provided
Expense	\$70,000	not provided
OCO	\$136,400	not provided
TOTAL	\$292,812	not provided

Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted

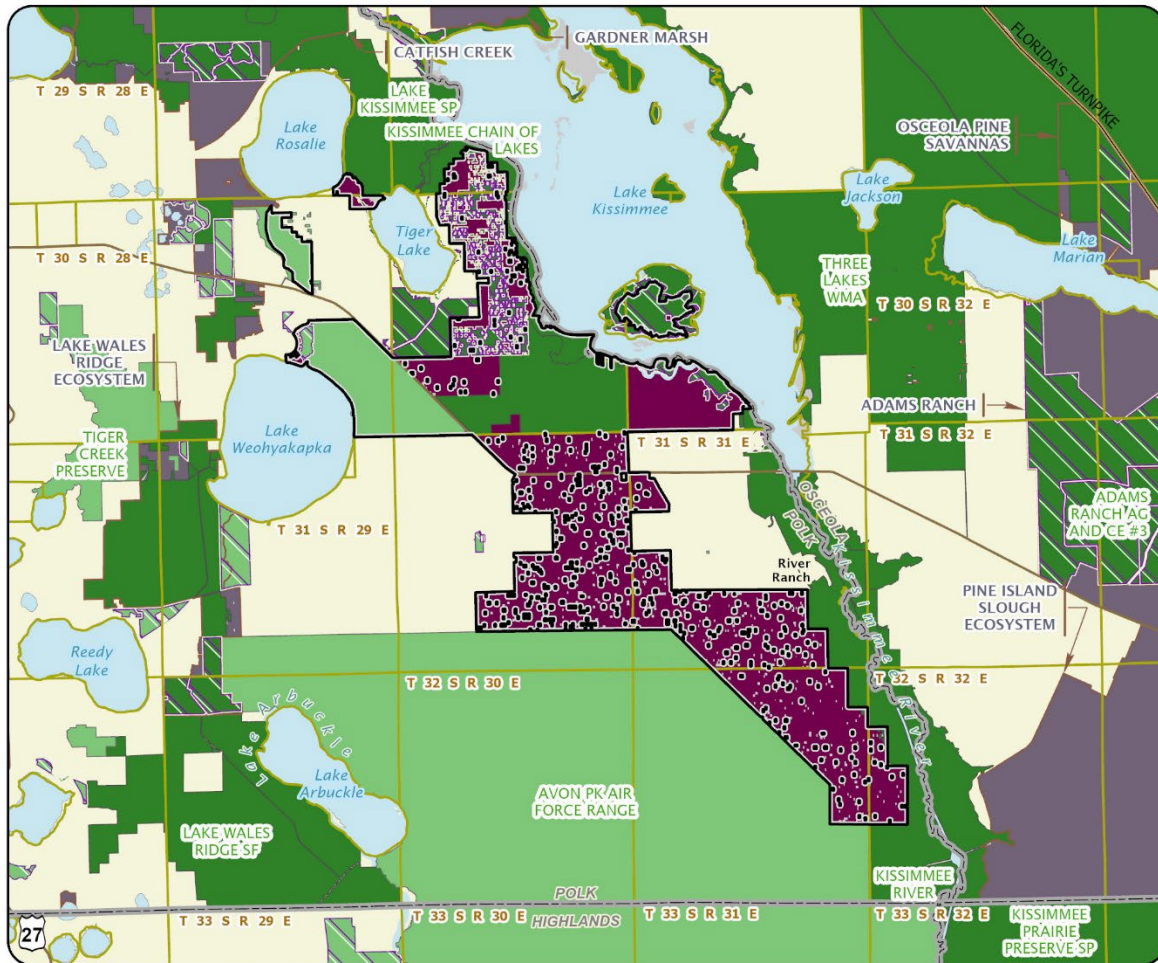




### BOMBING RANGE RIDGE: OVERVIEW

HIGHLANDS, POLK, AND OSCEOLA COUNTIES

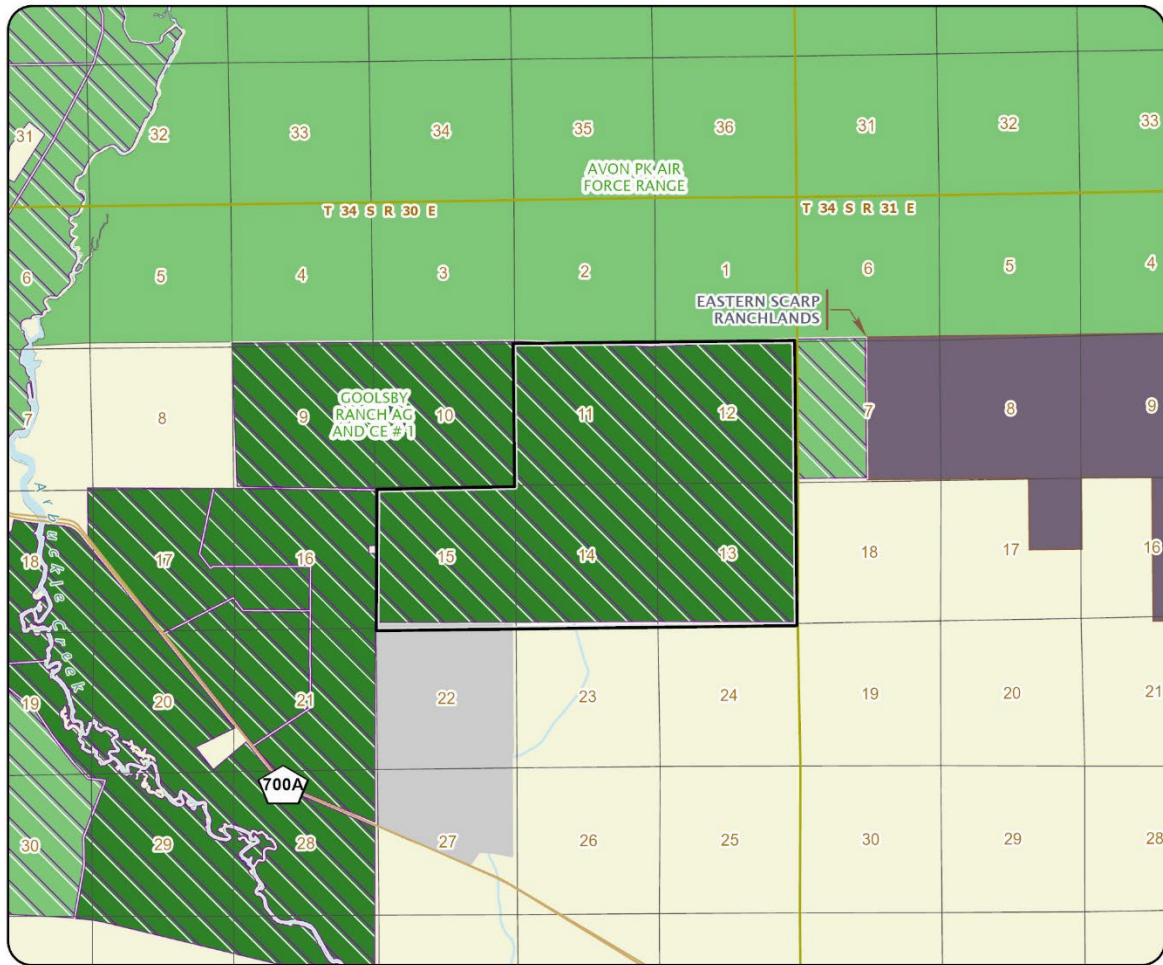




**BOMBING RANGE RIDGE: MAP 1**

**POLK AND OSCEOLA COUNTIES**





**BOMBING RANGE RIDGE: MAP 2**

**HIGHLANDS COUNTY**

